

Authors' comments to Anonymous Referee #1

We would like to thank the reviewer for the thorough review of our manuscript and insightful feedback. These comments have significantly improved the quality of our work. In the following sections, we present the reviewer's comments (in black), our responses (in red), and the changes made in the revised manuscript (in blue). Please note that all line numbers in our responses correspond to those in the revised manuscript.

Overall comments:

Review of "Latent heat feedbacks and the self-lofting of seeded ice plumes: Insights from bin microphysics simulations:" by Zhang et al. submitted to ACP.

Recommendation: accept after minor revisions.

This paper discusses numerical simulations of glaciogenic seeding of a stratiform cloud observed in the CLOUDLAB field project. This is a nice manuscript almost ready to be accepted. I only have several suggestions and technical comments that need to be addressed to clarify specific aspects of the presentation.

Specific comments:

1. L. 24: delete "whereas".

Fixed, thanks!

2. The paragraph starting in L. 26. The discussion of latent heat release and buoyancy effects lacks clarity. First, there is always a competition between latent heat release due cloud particles growth (a positive impact on cloud buoyancy) and a negative impact associated with water/ice condensate loading. The buoyancy is given by $Q(1+e q_v - Q)$, where Q is the total condensate (water plus ice) and other symbols are as usual. Freezing of liquid water due to seeding does not change Q , but it provides an increase of Q due to the latent heat of freezing. This is the initial "kick" of the buoyancy resulting from seeding. The subsequent (arguably rapid) growth of the ice phase increases both Q and Q , but – similarly to the condensation – the latent heating due to additional diffusional growth of ice crystals is much larger than the additional loading effect. The thermodynamic effect of seeding after the initial "kick" is about extracting additional heating of the plume due to growth of ice particles and evaporation of cloud droplets that brings

the environmental humidity closer to ice saturation. The net effect of the ice growth and evaporation of cloud water corresponds the latent heat of freezing (i.e., the difference between the latent heats of sublimation and condensation). The above discussion reminds me of the cold invigoration (per Rosenfeld et al. 2008) where the latent heating approximately balances the condensate loading. Please see section 2a in Grabowski and Morrison (JAS 2021) if you are curious.

Response to comments 2&10&11:

Thanks! We agree that the competition between latent heat release and condensate loading, as well as the distinction between the initial freezing "kick" and subsequent WBF growth, is crucial for a complete understanding of the plume dynamics. Following your suggestion, we conducted 40 additional ensemble simulations (20 members each) to quantitatively decompose these effects:

1. WBF-off seeding case ($L_s = L_c$): This isolates the effect of the initial freezing "kick" by eliminating the net latent heat gain ($L_f = L_s - L_c$) during the WBF process.
2. No-ice seeding case: This acts as a passive tracer baseline, representing the plume evolution governed solely by background dynamics.

Our results (now detailed in Section 4.3 and Figures 9 and 10) provide a nuanced view of the mechanisms you described:

We have revised the Introduction (L29–37), Numerical Setup (L171–182), and added a new results subsection (Section 4.3, L258–278) to incorporate these findings. We believe these additions provide the "solid understanding of physical processes" requested.

L29-38:

Following the initial ice initiation—the so-called "latent heat kick" from droplet freezing—the ice phase undergoes rapid diffusional growth. During this stage, the latent heating produced by sublimation/deposition significantly outweighs the additional weight of the ice phase (condensate loading), effectively invigorating the cloud plume. While some studies have explored the resilience of cloud microphysics to environmental changes (Grabowski and Morrison, 2021), the specific roles of the initial freezing "kick" versus the subsequent feedbacks driven by the WBF mechanism and adiabatic cooling in governing plume dynamics remain under-examined. A fundamental question, therefore, arises: to what extent is the evolution of an ice plume determined by the initial vertical wind conditions at the time of nucleation, as opposed to being sustained and amplified by the seeding-induced microphysical–thermodynamic feedbacks—including

both the initial latent heat 'kick' from droplet freezing and the subsequent latent heat release associated with the transition from liquid and vapor to the ice phase?

L190-204:

To further isolate the physical mechanisms driving the plume evolution and to address the relative importance of the initial latent heat "kick" versus the subsequent WBF-driven feedbacks, two additional sets of 20-member ensemble simulations were conducted. These 40 simulations use the same initiation times as the original seeding ensemble to ensure a direct comparison under identical dynamical backgrounds: (1) WBF-off seeding case ($L_s = L_c$): In these simulations, the latent heat of sublimation (L_s) is set equal to the latent heat of condensation (L_c) in the model's thermodynamic equations. This modification effectively eliminates the net latent heat gain ($L_f = L_s - L_c$) otherwise produced when ice crystals grow at the expense of cloud droplets (the WBF process). Furthermore, it ensures that any depositional growth driven by adiabatic cooling during the plume's ascent only releases heat equivalent to L_c , thereby removing the extra energetic contribution of freezing (L_f). This setup allows the initial latent heat release from the freezing of cloud droplets (the "initial kick") to occur normally while suppressing the enhanced thermodynamic feedback during subsequent ice growth; (2) No-ice seeding case: In this baseline ensemble, INPs are released into the domain as passive tracers, but the ice nucleation process is disabled. This case serves as a reference to represent the plume's evolution governed solely by the background turbulent flow, in the absence of any microphysical–thermodynamic feedbacks. By comparing these two sensitivity ensembles with the original seeding simulations, we can quantitatively decompose the total buoyancy gain into contributions from the initial freezing event and the subsequent growth-driven intensification supported by both WBF and adiabatic cooling.

L297-334:

4.3 Decomposing thermodynamic drivers: delayed feedback and the role of WBF

To disentangle the distinct thermodynamic drivers of the plume evolution, we compare the ice plume trajectories and their corresponding mean buoyancy across three sensitivity configurations: the Normal, WBF-off, and no-ice seeding cases (Figs. 9 and 12). To provide a more quantitative assessment of the time evolution, we analyze the accumulated altitude differences between these configurations in 100-s intervals (Fig. 11). During the initial stage of evolution ($t <$

300 s), the trajectories remain nearly identical, which is physically explained by the evolution of plume buoyancy shown in Fig. 12. In the first 200 seconds, the buoyancy across all three ensembles shows minimal deviation and the accumulated height differences remain close to zero (Fig. 11). This indicates that neither the initial latent heat of freezing nor the WBF growth exerts a significant immediate influence on the plume's altitude. During this period, vertical motion is almost entirely governed by the pre-existing environmental vertical velocity.

A distinct thermodynamic response emerges as the plumes evolve. Between $t = 200$ s and $t = 500$ s, the buoyancy of both the Normal and WBF-off cases begins to increase significantly relative to the no-ice-nucleation baseline. As shown in Fig. 11, the height difference between the WBF-off and No-ice cases (green line) rises more rapidly than the difference between the Normal and WBF-off cases (blue line) during this interval. This suggests that the initial buoyancy gain is primarily attributed to the latent heat released during the freezing of cloud droplets and the onset of depositional growth at the condensation rate (L_c). This pulse of energy provides the impulse for the "secondary ascent" observed after 300 s.

The mature stage ($t > 600$ s) is characterized by a secondary divergence in buoyancy, where the Normal plumes (solid lines in Fig. 12) exhibit a consistently higher rate of buoyancy increase compared to the WBF-off ($L_s = L_c$) plumes (dashed lines). Also, the accumulated height difference between the Normal and WBF-off cases (blue line in Fig. 11) shows a steady, non-linear increase over time. These two divergences represent the combined thermodynamic contribution of the WBF process and the enhanced depositional growth driven by adiabatic cooling. By extracting the latent heat of freezing (L_f) during the transition from both liquid and vapor phases to ice, these processes act as a persistent "internal engine" that sustains the plume's upward momentum.

This late-stage effect is quantified in Fig. 10 by calculating the ratio R_{WBF} :

$$R_{\text{WBF}} = \frac{Z_{\text{Normal}} - Z_{\text{WBF off}}}{Z_{\text{Normal}} - Z_{\text{no ice}}}$$

The WBF-driven heating accounts for approximately 25% to 30% of the total seeding-induced altitude gain. While the freezing component accounts for the majority (70%) of the total thermodynamic invigoration, the buoyancy plots confirm the reviewer's intuition that the WBF growth is critical for sustaining the upward momentum in the mature stage of the plume's life cycle.

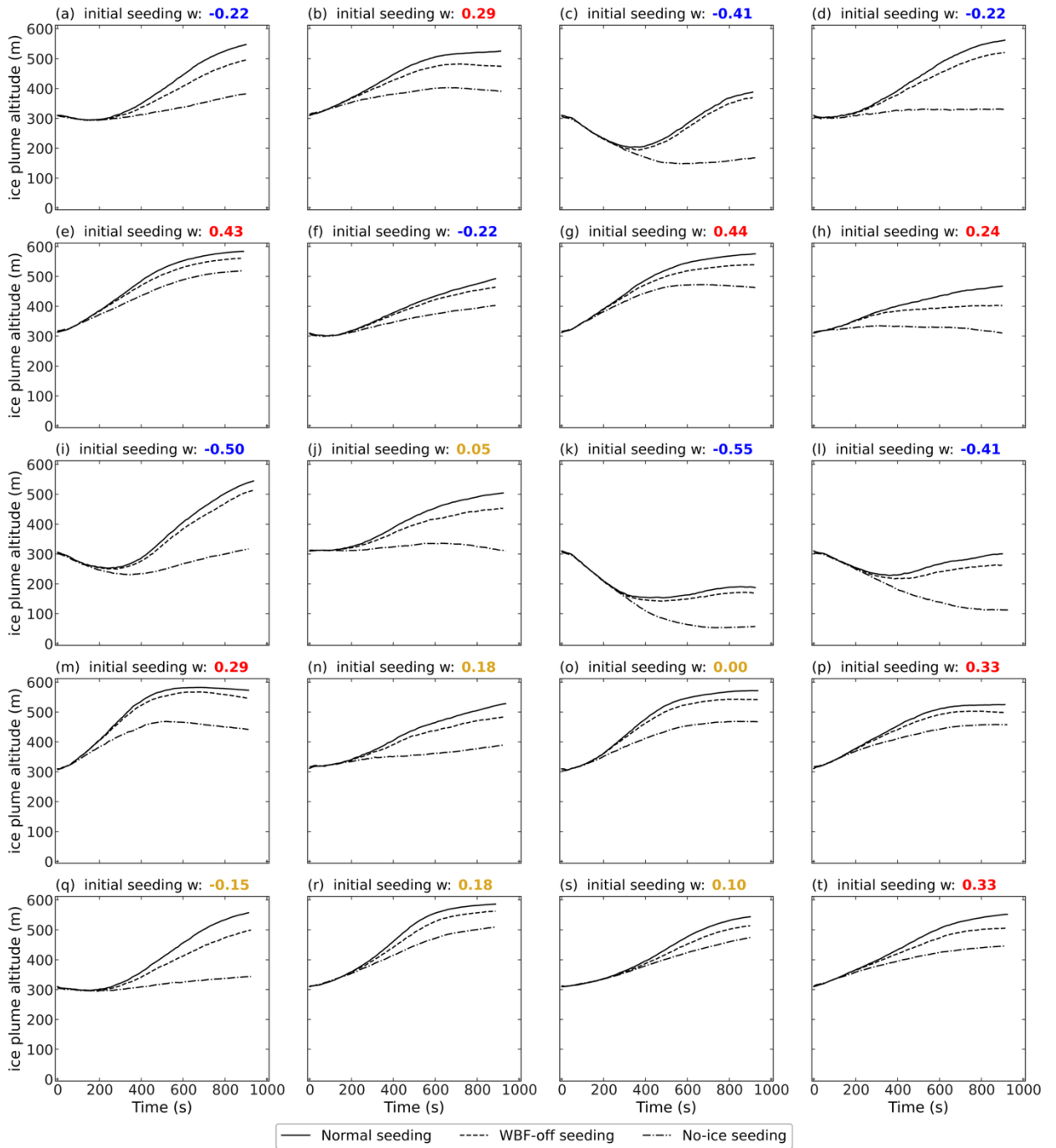


Figure 9 Time evolution of the mean altitude of the ice plume in all simulations, with INP injection initiated at 1-minute intervals from 0 to 1140 s (19 min). Solid curves represent the default configuration; dashed curves show results from simulations in which latent heating associated with the WBF process is disabled by setting the latent heat of sublimation equal to that of evaporation; dash-dotted curves indicate the mean altitude of INPs in simulations without ice nucleation

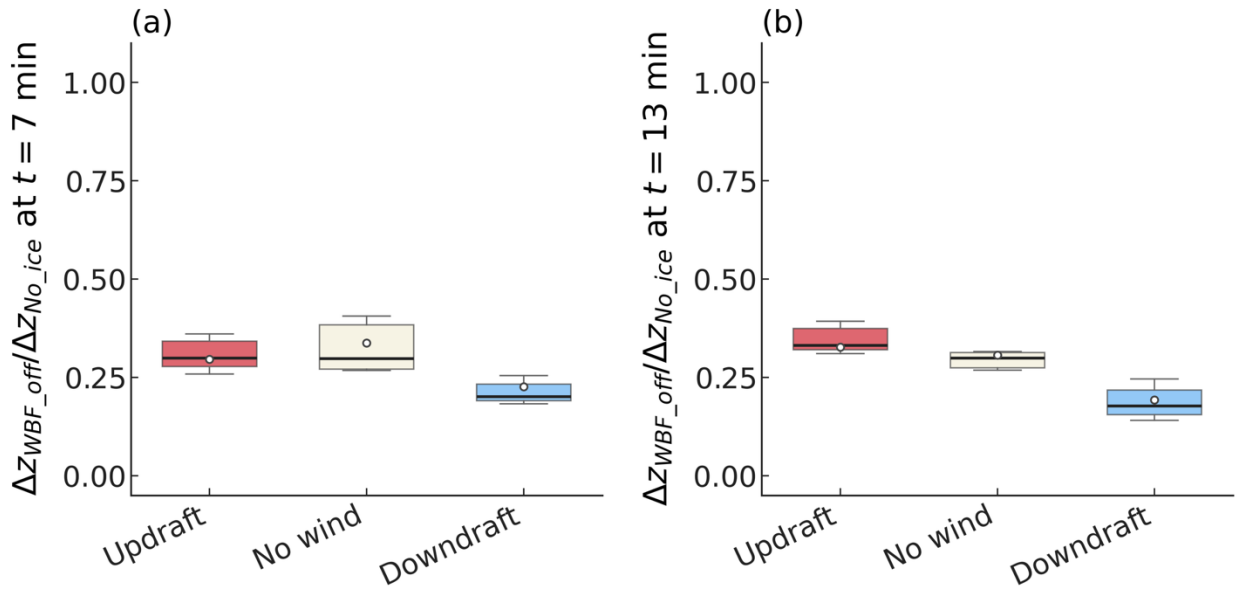


Figure 10 The ratio of the mean-altitude difference between the default and no-WBF-heating simulations to that between the default and no-ice-nucleation simulations at (a) 7 and (b) 13 min. Here, R_{WBF} is defined in eq. 2.

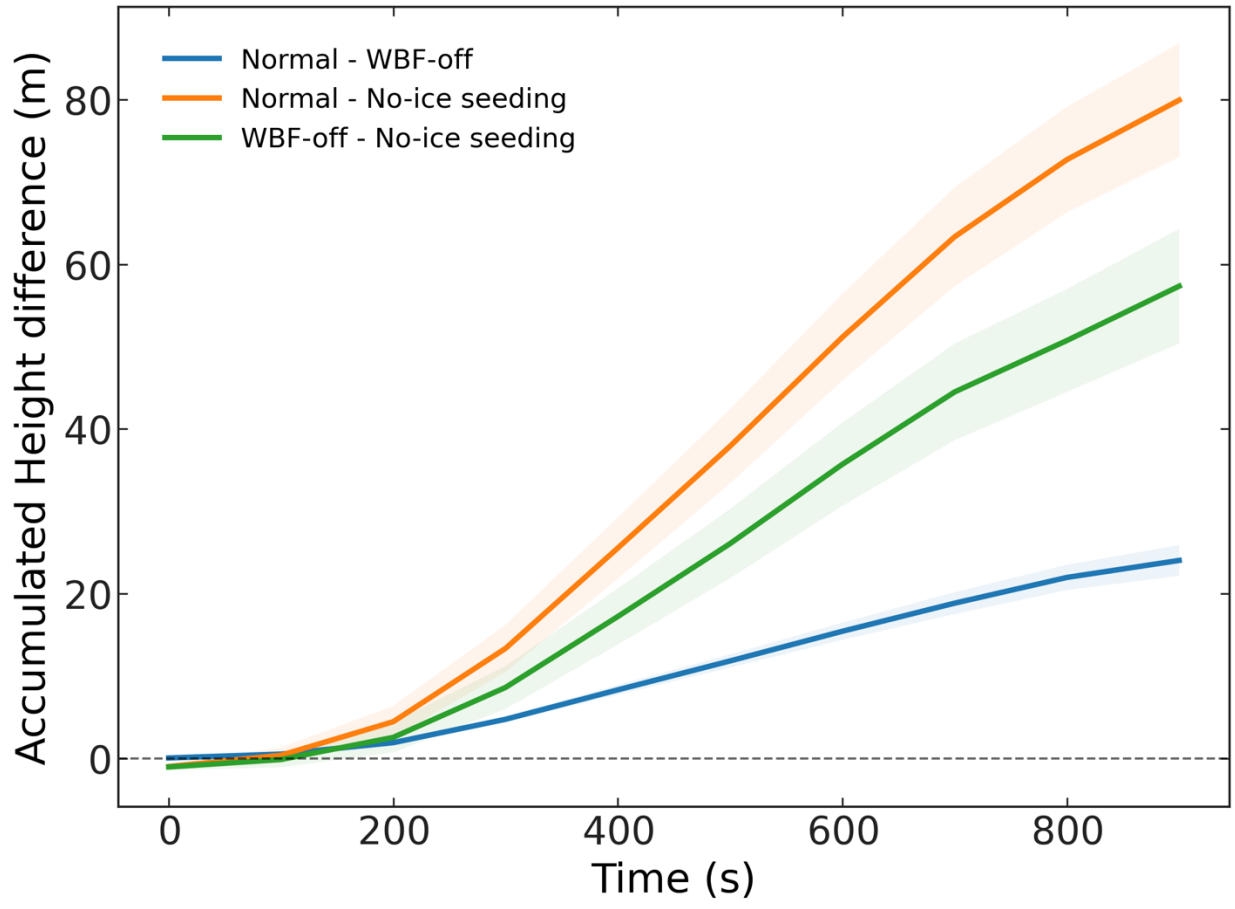


Figure 11 Time evolution of the accumulated plume-height differences between the three model configurations: Normal, WBF-off, and No-ice seeding. The height difference is calculated as the difference in mean plume altitude between two configurations within 100 s time intervals and averaged over all trajectories. Positive values indicate that the first configuration exhibits a higher plume altitude than the second configuration. Shaded regions represent the standard error of the mean across trajectories.

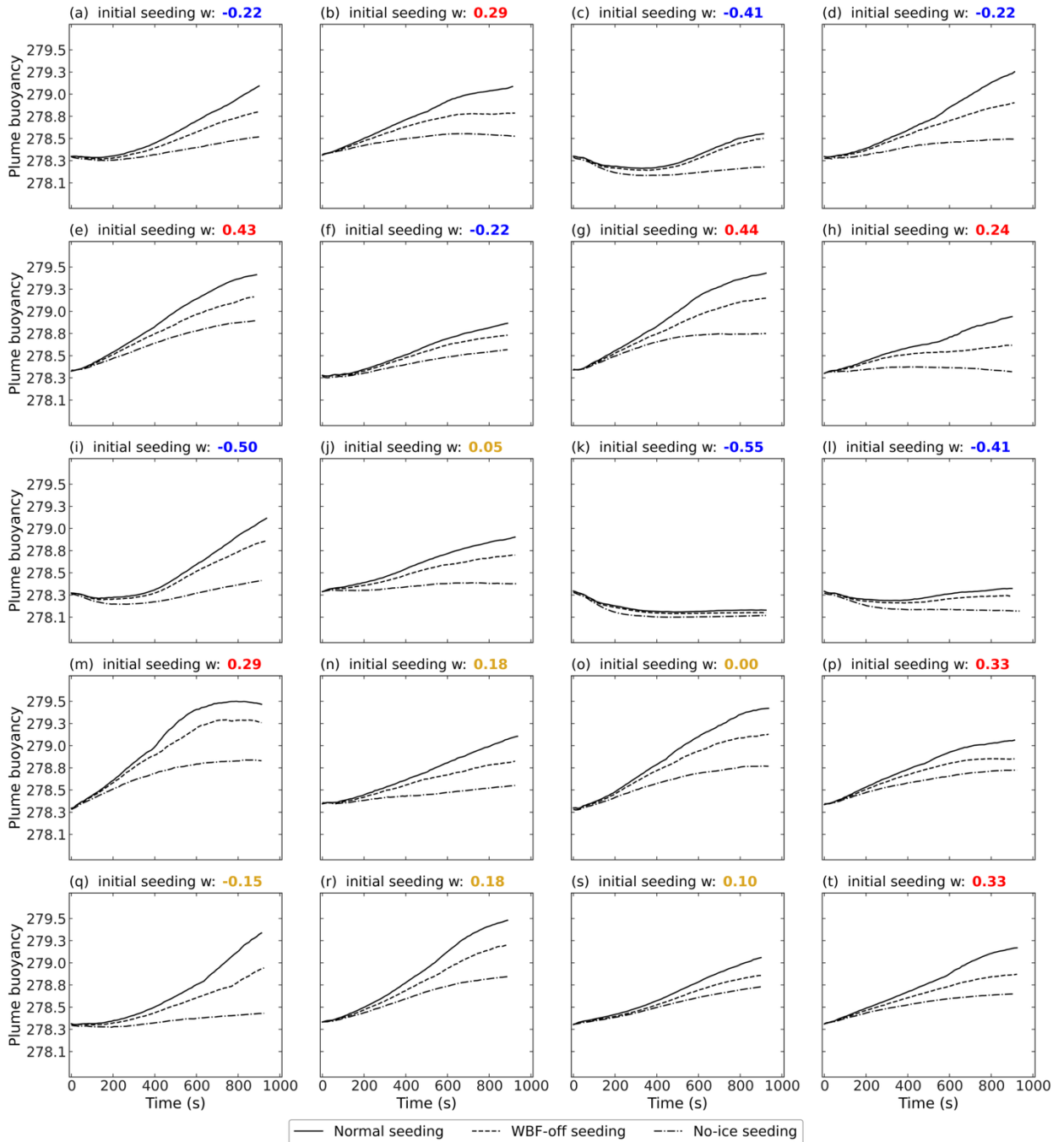


Figure 12 Same as Fig. 10, but for the time evolution of the mean buoyancy of the ice plume.

- L. 46 and 49. A reference to SCALE-AMPS (and perhaps an explanation of the acronym) is needed here.

Thanks! We now provide the full name for the acronym SCALE-AMPS.

L55-58:

Models such as the Scalable Computing for Advanced Library and Environment—Advanced Microphysics Prediction System (SCALE-AMPS; Ong et al. (2022)) explicitly represent the size-, shape-, and habit-dependent evolution

of ice particles while capturing the feedback between phase changes and air motion (Hashino and Tripoli, 2007b).

4. L. 78. Explain “inferred collision rate”.

Thanks! We have added a brief clarification for the term "inferred collision rate" in the revised manuscript.

L88-90:

..... and the ice–ice collision rate inferred from observed ice microphysical properties and deep learning techniques (see Zhang et al. 2025 for detailed methodology), using consistent definitions and averaging procedures for model output and observations.

5. L. 83. “primitive equations” is incorrect. This term traditionally refers to the hydrostatic large-scale equations. I suggest “small scale nonhydrostatic equations” or something like that.

Fixed, thanks!

6. L. 115. Please provide distribution parameters.

Thanks! Following the reviewer’s request, we have provided the specific parameters in the main text.

L129-131:

...a lognormal size distribution. The distribution is characterized by a total number concentration of 317 cm^{-3} (corresponding to the observed mean cloud droplet number concentration), a geometric mean radius of $0.052 \mu\text{m}$, and a geometric standard deviation of 0.71. The CCN are assumed to consist entirely of ammonium bisulfate (NH_4HSO_4).

7. Section 3.2, L. 85. The subgrid-scale scheme in the model excludes supersaturation fluctuations (e.g., as in Grabowski and Abade JAS 2017 and others), correct? Perhaps worth mentioning.

The reviewer is correct. We have added a statement in Section 3.1 to explicitly mention this simplification and have included the reference to Grabowski and Abade (2017) in the description.

L97-100:

The current subgrid-scale scheme does not account for local supersaturation fluctuations (e.g., Grabowski and Abade, 2017a). This idealization implies that microphysical processes, such as ice nucleation and droplet activation, are computed based on grid-mean thermodynamic states, a common simplification in current LES frameworks.

8. Fig. 2, left panel. I assume the dots represent 20 members of ensemble simulations, correct?

Yes, the reviewer is correct. We have updated the caption of Figure 2 to explicitly state this for better clarity.

Fig 2 caption:

... are released. The dots indicate the specific vertical wind speeds at the 20 distinct initiation times for the ensemble members. (b) schematic illustration

9. Figs. 4 and 5. It is not clear how ice and water statistics are derived from observations and from model simulations. The way statistics are gathered needs to be clearly explained. The horizontal scale in Fig. 5 is strange. It is not linear, correct? Why? Perhaps it follows the instrument used in the observations? Please explain/change.

We have added a more detailed explanation of how the ice and water statistics were obtained in Figs. 4 and 5, as well as of the horizontal scale in Fig. 5.

L212-227:

In this section, the validity of the numerical setup is assessed by comparing results from the reference simulation with in situ observations obtained on 24 January 2023. Specifically, comparisons are made for ICNC, CDNC, LWC, ice crystal aspect ratio, and size distribution. The observational data used for comparison were collected using the HOLIMO instrument at an altitude of approximately 400 m above ground level (AGL) and approximately 2 km downstream of the seeding drone (the balloon carrying the instrument was advected by the wind). The data were collected starting at 18:16:25 UTC, when the instrument first detected ice crystals. Each data point represents a time snapshot with an ice crystal present. The means, medians, and standard deviations are computed from this time series.

In the simulation, these quantities are sampled from grid cells located 2 km downstream of the seeding region and between 400 and 450 m AGL, when the ice plume passes through these grid cells and the ICNC exceeds 10 L^{-1} . This sampling strategy is designed to match the location and conditions of the observational measurements. The means, medians, and standard deviations are computed in the same manner as for the observational data.

The bin resolution in AMPS differs from that of the instrument. In AMPS, the size distribution is defined as a function of ice crystal mass and follows a logarithmic mass grid (Hashino and Tripoli, 2007a). To enable direct comparison of the mean

ice crystal aspect ratio and number concentration in each bin, the bin boundaries are converted from mass to equivalent spherical diameter using the volume relation of a sphere, assuming an ice crystal density of 0.916 g cm^{-3} . The observed aspect ratio and size distribution data are then re-binned accordingly.

10. Results in section 4.2 This is a suggestion for a possible further quantification of the latent heating effects in cloud seeding experiments and simulations. I do not suggest to conduct such simulations for the current paper, but perhaps for the future publication(s). Following 2 above, to unequivocally quantify the role of latent heating, one may manipulate numerical values of the latent heats in model simulations. Specifically, setting the latent heat of freezing to zero would allow to separate the initial “kick” of the seeding (i.e., initial freezing of cloud droplets) from the subsequent latent heating associated with the WBF ice growth. My feeling is that the initial “kick” is less important, but the subsequent growth of ice particles (i.e., reaching into the ice versus water saturation reservoir) is critical. Current simulations do not allow for such an assessment. In addition, by replacing latent heat of sublimation with the latent heat of condensation one can eliminate the net effect of ice growth and evaporation of cloud droplets in the WBF mechanism. Such additional model simulations can provide solid understanding of physical processes involved.

See Response to comments 2&10&11

11. A simple addition to the current manuscript following the above comment would be to include buoyancy plots as additional panels in Fig. 6.

See Response to comments 2&10&11

12. L. 227. I do not find any appendix in the paper. In general, it would be great to have a couple 3D visualizations of the ice plume from model simulations.

Added, thanks!

L430-432:

Appendix A: Three-dimensional animations

Three-dimensional animations of the simulated ice and liquid mixing ratios, corresponding to INP injection initiated at 6 min (strongest updraft), 9 min (reference case), and 10 min (strongest downdraft), are available at <https://zenodo.org/records/19731239>.

13. Fig. 7. Similar to 9 above. Please define the plume. I assume IWC larger than a threshold, correct? Give the threshold value. How is the accumulated latent heat calculated? It excludes the latent heat of condensation, correct?

We have added this explanation for plume definition and accumulated latent heat to the text (Section 4.2).

L271-275:

The cumulative latent heat is calculated as the time-integral of the net phase-change energy within the plume cells (defined as grid cells where ICNC exceeds the 70th percentile, corresponding to ICNC values of approximately 100 L^{-1} or greater). This term specifically represents the excess heating relative to the non-seeded baseline ($Q - Q_{\text{no ice}}$), thereby isolating the latent heat of freezing and the net heating from the WBF process while excluding the background latent heat of condensation associated with the ambient cloud.

14. Fig. 8. Provide details of the boxplots (range of percentiles, etc).

Following the reviewer's suggestion, we have added the statistical details of the boxplots to the caption of Figure 8.

Fig 8 caption:

Boxplots of the vertical extent (altitude spread) of the ice plumes sampled at downstream distances of (a) $y=2$ km, (b) $y=3$ km, and (c) $y=4$ km. In each boxplot, the central horizontal line and the white circle represent the median and the mean values, respectively. The top and bottom edges of the box indicate the 75th and 25th percentiles, while the whiskers extend to the 5th and 95th percentiles.

15. Shaded areas in Fig. 9, 10, and 11. This is explained only in the Fig. 9 caption. But the explanation does not make sense: "Shaded areas represent the standard deviation across the ensemble members for each wind regime". I would think "for all wind regimes", correct? Please clarify. Add to captions of Fig. 10 and 11.

Corrected, thanks!

Fig 13 caption:

Temporal evolution of mean ice microphysical properties averaged within the plume. (a) Ice Crystal Number Concentration (ICNC), showing dilution due to dispersion. (b) Mean ice diameter (D_{ice}). (c) Ice Water Content (IWC). Shaded areas represent the standard deviation across the ensemble members for each wind regime.

Fig 15 caption:

Evolution of Ice Particle Size Distributions () sampled at downstream distances of (a) $y = 2$ km, (b) $y = 3$ km, and (c) $y = 4$ km. Shaded areas are as in Fig. 13

Fig 16 caption:

Temporal response of the liquid phase within the ice plume. (a) Cloud Droplet Number Concentration (CDNC). (b) Mean liquid droplet diameter (D_{liq}). (c) Relative Humidity (RH) with respect to water. Shaded areas are as in Fig. 13

16. Finally, I am curious if selected references to other glaciogenic seeding experiments should be included in the introduction (e.g., Tessendorf et al. BAMS. 2017 and references therein). This might provide a better context for the observations and simulations reported in the manuscript.

Thanks! We agree that providing a broader context of glaciogenic seeding experiments enhances the introduction. We have now included references to introduction section.

L43-50:

Historically, glaciogenic seeding has been extensively studied to assess its potential for precipitation enhancement, with major field campaigns such as SNOWIE providing comprehensive evidence of cloud-seeding-induced snowfall over mountainous terrain (Tessendorf et al., 2019; Friedrich et al., 2021). While these meso-scale experiments have successfully demonstrated the macroscopic impact of seeding, the fundamental microphysical-dynamical interactions at the plume scale remain challenging to isolate. CLOUDLAB (Henneberger et al., 2023) campaign employing uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs) and in situ instrumentation have enabled detailed characterization of seeded ice plumes, revealing rapid ice growth, efficient liquid water depletion, and enhanced aggregation (Miller et al., 2024, 2025; Ramelli et al., 2024; Fuchs et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025).