Teachers' Creativity in Teaching Islamic Religious Education and Its Impact on Students' Learning Interests

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aims to describe the creativity of Islamic Religious Education teachers in teaching and its relation to the learning interests of grade VII students at Muhammadiyah Pone Junior High School.

Methodology: This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type to gain an in-depth understanding of creative learning strategies carried out by Islamic Religious Education teachers in the school context. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, students, and principals, direct observation in teaching and learning activities, and analysis of supporting documents such as learning implementation plans and evaluation notes. Data analysis was carried out using data reduction techniques, data presentation, and interactive conclusion drawn. The research procedure includes the preparation stage (determining the focus of the problem and research permits), the stage of data collection in the field, the stage of repeated analysis to find creative learning patterns, to the stage of verifying findings through triangulation of sources and methods.

Main Findings: The results of the study show that Islamic Religious Education Teachers apply various creative approaches, such as the use of Islamic stories, simulations of worship practices, visual media, and contextual discussions related to students' daily lives.

Novelty/Originality of this study: Islamic Religious Education learning that is managed creatively, with the support of the principal, is able to foster student involvement and interest in learning in a more meaningful way, so that grade VII students have high enthusiasm, activeness in class, and positive learning interest in Islamic Religious Education subjects.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the main foundation for fulfilling the needs of human life and plays a crucial role in shaping the character of students. As a multidimensional process, education not only transfers knowledge but also shapes attitudes, values, and motivation for continuous learning [1], [2]. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, it serves to equip students with an understanding of religious values and the ability to internalize teachings as a guideline for daily life. The role of Islamic Religious Education teachers is very strategic because teachers are not just conveyors of material, but facilitators of values and examples [3].

One of the indicators of the success of the learning process is the interest in learning of students. Learning interest is influenced by many internal and external factors, including the way the material is delivered, the relevance of the learning context, and the quality of teacher-student interaction. Recent studies emphasize that the learning context significantly affects students' situational motivation [4], [5]. Teachers' creativity in planning and presenting learning has been recognized as one of the important factors that drive students' interest in learning. Creative teachers are able to present a variety of methods, media, and strategies that foster curiosity, active engagement, and meaningful learning experiences [6], [7].

Studies in Indonesia show a positive relationship between the creativity of Islamic religious education teachers and students' interest in learning. Several quantitative and qualitative studies at the secondary school level confirm this positive influence, although the magnitude and quality of creative practice vary between school contexts. However, most research in the field has more described correlations or descriptions of creative practices without delving into the more fundamental psychological mechanisms that explain why teachers' creativity increases interest in learning. Therefore, theoretical and empirical studies that link creativity to motivational theory are important [8]. In terms of creativity theory, Teresa Amabile's Componential Model emphasizes that creativity depends on domain skills, creativity skills, and task motivation, while environmental support (school policy missions, resources) also plays an important role in enabling teachers to be creative. This model is relevant to explain the conditions of schools that facilitate or inhibit teaching creativity [9].

Meanwhile, motivation theories such as *Self-Determination Theory* explains that basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness) affect students' intrinsic motivations. When teachers implement creative strategies that increase their sense of competence and connectedness, students' intrinsic motivation towards the subject tends to increase [10]. In the practice of Islamic Religious Education, the application of contextual approaches, the use of interactive media, relevant religious storytelling, and the integration of educational technology have been proven to increase student engagement. Systematic studies show that the use of storytelling in religious teaching effectively connects students' experiences with religious content, thereby increasing attention, empathy, and learning engagement [11].

The use of digital storytelling and the task of creating "digital stories" has also been reported to deepen students' emotional and reflective engagement with religious themes and encourage active participation [12]. Meta-analytical evidence and educational reviews confirm that active learning strategies (e.g., contextual and interactive multimedia activities) result in increased engagement and learning outcomes compared to traditional lecture teaching [13]. In addition, reviews and empirical studies related to digital storytelling and learning technology have found that digital narratives, multimodal media, and interactive platforms (video, AR/VR, online quizzes) consistently boost student motivation, attention, and participation at various levels of education (synthesis of findings: systematic reviews 2021–2023). A recent study on student engagement in face-to-face and online environments also confirms that learning designs that combine narrative, multimodal, and digital interaction elements improve student engagement post-pandemic [14].

Several studies in Indonesia noted that teachers who use problem-based learning models, blended learning, or collaborative activities tend to see an increase in student participation and enthusiasm in Islamic religious education subjects. However, teacher readiness and infrastructure support are often obstacles to implementation [15], [16]. In addition to the methods and media aspects, organizational factors such as professional training, teacher certification, and school management support also contribute to teachers' ability to innovate. Studies show that certified and trained teachers tend to adopt creative practices more.

On the other hand, the heterogeneity of characteristics including cultural background, level of religiosity, and cognitive abilities requires adaptive teaching strategies. Teachers' creativity must be responsive to this diversity in order to maximize learning interest in all ranges of students. International studies also confirm that classroom environmental factors such as social support, freedom of exploration, and the use of open-ended assignments encourage the emergence of students' interest and involvement in both religious and secular subject contexts. This is in line with Amabile's principle of the importance of task motivation and a supportive environment [15], [17].

However, recent meta-research or systematic review shows that the influence of teacher creativity is influenced by mediation and moderation variables such as teacher self-efficacy, school culture, and access to technology. This indicates that efforts to increase teacher creativity must be holistic (individual and organizational). At the practical level, interventions that have proven effective include creativity development training, professional collaboration between teachers, and the preparation of Learning Implementation Plans that emphasize open activities and formative assessments that provide space for students' creativity. These approaches also strengthen students' intrinsic motivation [18].

For the context of junior high school/MTs, there is a need for more in-depth research on how the creativity of Islamic Religious Education teachers is realized in daily learning activities (*in-class practices)*, as well as how the practice impacts the dimensions of learning interest (cognitive, affective, conative). Many current studies are still descriptive in nature. In addition, field observations in several studies show that there is a gap between

teachers' intention to innovate and the ability to implement them sustainably. Administrative barriers, dense curriculum, and preparation time often reduce the intensity of pedagogical experiments [19].

Gap analysis shows that previous research has emphasized the general correlation between teachers' creativity and learning interests, but has not revealed how creative strategies are implemented in daily classroom practice, as well as how they affect the dimensions of learning interest (cognitive, affective, and contive). In other words, there is a lack of in-depth understanding of the experience of teachers and students in the context of Islamic Religious Education learning interactions, especially at the junior high school/MTs level.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of presenting new empirical evidence regarding the forms of teacher creativity in teaching Islamic Religious Education that are able to answer the challenge of low student interest in learning. This research is also relevant to national education policies that encourage active, creative, and contextual learning, and support the vision of religious values-based schools. Based on this, this study aims to:

1) Describe the forms of creativity of Islamic religious education teachers in classroom learning practices.
2) Explain the mechanism of how the creativity of Islamic religious education teachers can increase students' interest in learning.
3) Provide practical recommendations for teachers and schools in developing more interesting, interactive, and meaningful Islamic religious education learning strategies.

Thus, this research is expected to be able to make a theoretical contribution to the study of teachers' creativity and learning interests, as well as offer practical solutions to improve the quality of learning of Islamic religious education at Muhammadiyah Bone Junior High School, Gorontalo Regency.

2. RESEARCH METHOD
2.1. Types of Research

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, which was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the creativity of Islamic Religious Education teachers in the teaching process and its impact on students' learning interests [20], [21]. The research subjects include Islamic Religious Education teachers and grade VII students who were selected purposively based on relevance to the research objectives. Islamic Religious Education teachers are the focus because of their position as the main implementers in the application of creative learning methods, while grade VII students are chosen because they are students who experience the direct influence of teachers' creativity in the learning process. The subject selection process is carried out through coordination with the school and the principal, taking into account the active involvement of Islamic Religious Education teachers in learning as well as the readiness of students to take part in interviews and observations.

The research subjects consist of Islamic Religious Education Teachers, as the main focus because they have a central role in designing and implementing creative learning strategies; Grade VII students, who are selected purposively based on activeness, involvement in learning, and willingness to participate in interviews and observations; and the principal, as additional informants to provide contextual perspectives on school policies and support for teacher creativity.

In qualitative research, the researcher plays the role of the main instrument (human instrument) that manages all stages of data collection and analysis [22]. To support the process, several auxiliary instruments were used, namely, a) Participatory observation guidelines; b) Semi-structured interview guide; and c) Documentation sheets (photos, audio, learning documents). This instrument is designed to ensure its direction to the focus of research, namely teacher creativity and student learning interest.

2.2. Research Procedure

The research procedure was carried out in four stages:
1. The preparation/pre-research stage, including initial observation, licensing, and instrument preparation.
2. The stage of data collection, observation, interviews, and documentation in the classroom.
3. The data analysis stage, including data reduction, data presentation, and withdrawal Conclusion [23].
4. Verification & reporting stages, source triangulation, method triangulation, and member check with informants.
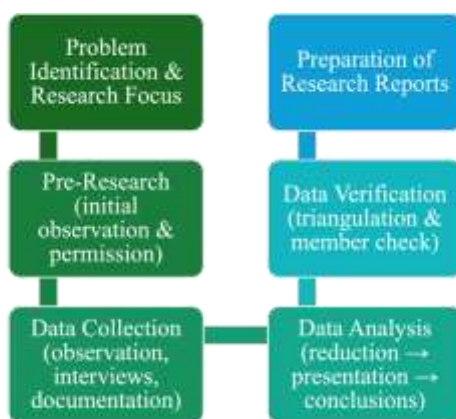
Research Procedure Flow Diagram:

Figure 1. Research Procedure

2.3. Data Collection Techniques

Data is collected using three main techniques:
1. Participatory observation is carried out during the learning process, by recording the teacher's strategy, media use, teacher-student interaction, and classroom dynamics [24].
2. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Islamic religious education teachers, students, and principals to explore their experiences, perceptions, and views on learning creativity [25].
3. Documentation includes the collection of Learning Implementation Plans, evaluation notes, photos of activities, and learning media used to strengthen the data from observations and interviews.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study was applied inducively by following three main stages, namely: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. At the reduction stage, the data is filtered, simplified, and categorized according to relevant themes to facilitate management and focus of analysis. Furthermore, the data that has been reduced is presented in the form of a descriptive narrative that contains the results of observations and interview excerpts as supporting illustrations. The final stage is conclusion drawn, where patterns and relationships between data are analyzed in depth to answer research questions while meeting research objectives comprehensively [25]. To ensure the validity of the data, this study applied triangulation techniques both in terms of sources and methods. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing and cross-checking data obtained from various informants, namely teachers, students, and documentation data. Meanwhile, triangulation techniques are applied by comparing the results obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation to ensure the consistency and accuracy of information. In addition to these two techniques, this study also uses a member check procedure, which is to directly verify the findings with the research subjects to confirm the accuracy of the data that has been collected.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers, it was revealed that in the implementation of classroom learning, teachers try to avoid monotonous teaching patterns. For this reason, various innovative methods were applied, including the use of Islamic stories as the opening of the material, the use of images and short videos, as well as direct practices such as ablution and prayer simulations. In addition, students' active interaction is also encouraged through daily question and answer sessions and quizzes that are attractively designed. The teacher also said that learning media is often developed independently by adjusting the theme of the material and the characteristics of students in the classroom. The learning approach presented is concrete and contextual, in order to accommodate the diversity of students' learning abilities. This is very relevant to the study conducted by Fajar et al. [26] that creativity in the teaching process can help teachers be more effective in managing the classroom, encouraging student learning motivation, and improving the quality of learning delivered.

The principal said that Islamic Religious Education teachers are active and innovative educators; Teachers routinely participate in competency development training and are used as a source of reference by peers. These findings are in line with the study Principal's Visionary Leadership in Improving Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Pedagogic Competence in the Era of Society 5.0 [27] which shows that the visionary leadership of school principals is able to direct Islamic religious education teachers to use innovative methods and media. Furthermore, the research Teacher Innovation through Knowledge Management and Personality Strengthening [28] It was found that teachers who have an open personality and with good knowledge management are better able to develop

teaching creativity despite facing obstacles. However, obstacles in implementation are also reflected in the study The Impact of Teacher Empowerment on Schools' Innovation Climate [29], which while finding that teacher empowerment strengthens the innovation climate, also shows that without consistent institutional support and adequate facilities, teacher innovation can be hampered.

According to a statement from one of the Islamic Religious Education teachers, students' interest in learning Islamic Religious Education subjects is relatively high, especially when the learning method applied is participatory and involves the active involvement of students. This finding is supported by research Khansa et al. [30] which shows that an integrated learning model that combines active methods and the use of media in Islamic Religious Education at the junior high school level helps to increase student engagement and understanding. In addition, a study from Sihite et al. [31] shows that the use of visual learning media significantly increases the learning interest of grade VIII junior high school students, proving that visual media not only clarifies the material, but also increases students' motivation and activeness. The use of visual media and hands-on activities has been proven to make it easier for students to understand and remember the material taught. Some students even showed initiative to ask more in-depth questions or share their experiences of worship at home. The level of student attendance during Islamic Religious Education learning is also relatively high, and the tasks given are generally completed on time. The support from the principal strengthened the findings by stating that the subject of Islamic Religious Education became a favorite among students, thanks to the conducive learning atmosphere, no pressure, and focus on character development. The emotional closeness between students and teachers of Islamic Religious Education encourages open and comfortable interaction during the learning process.

Both Islamic Religious Education teachers and school principals agree that there is a close correlation between the level of teachers' creativity in teaching and students' interest in learning. Islamic religious education teachers said that when learning is only delivered through a monotonous lecture method, students tend to be passive, bored, and even sleepy. Conversely, when teachers use varied learning methods, the classroom atmosphere becomes more lively, students show high enthusiasm, excitement for learning, and active participation in class discussions. This is strengthened by the research of The Creativity of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Improving Student Learning Atmosphere at Junior High School in Jambi [32], who found that the use of innovative media and participatory methods improved the learning atmosphere in the affective and cognitive dimensions of students. The support of school principals in facilitating teacher innovation is relevant to the study Motivation contribution to religious learning behavior during the covid pandemic [33] which suggests that religious motivation and affiliation that may be triggered through creative learning methods contribute greatly to students' religious learning behavior. In addition, the research The Influence of Exemplary and Creativity of Akidah Akhlak Teachers' Learning on Student Religious Moderation [34] support that the creativity of the Akidah Akhlak teacher also shapes the spiritual and religious aspects of students. Thus, the creativity of Islamic religious education teachers not only increases interest in learning, but also plays an important role in strengthening the emotional, moral, and spiritual aspects of students.

Furthermore, a comparison with other educational conditions, as found Nguyen et al. [35] in Teaching and Teacher Education, which emphasizes that school culture and institutional support have a significant influence on teachers' pedagogical innovation. In addition, the study Taajamo et al. [36] In the International Journal of Educational Research shows that contextual factors, including religious values and social norms, can shape how teachers interpret and implement creative strategies in the classroom. Thus, comparison with findings from other schools in different contexts will provide a richer perspective on the variations in the application of teachers' creativity in diverse educational environments.

Based on the results of the interviews that have been conducted, the researcher draws the conclusion that the level of creativity of Islamic Religious Education teachers has a strong influence on students' interest in learning. Teachers who are able to design and manage learning innovatively and create a pleasant classroom atmosphere tend to be able to arouse enthusiasm and joy in learning in students. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant and mutually supportive relationship between teachers' creativity in the learning process and students' increased interest in Islamic Religious Education lessons.

Table 1. Summary of the Interview Results

Aspects	Interview Results of Islamic Religious Education Teacher	Principal Interview Results	Researcher's Opinion
The Creativity Level of Islamic Religious Education Teachers	Using varied methods (stories, simulations, quizzes, Q&A); Self-made media	Teachers are active, creative, and become a reference for other teachers	Teachers' creativity is excellent and contextual
Students' Learning Interests	Students are enthusiastic, actively ask questions, love	Islamic Religious Education is a favorite	Students' interest in learning is high,

	Islamic Religious Education lessons	subject; Students feel comfortable and happy	influenced by the teacher's approach
The Relationship Between Creativity and Learning Interest	Creative methods make students more active and enthusiastic	Creative teachers = students are more engaged and comfortable	There is a significant relationship between teacher creativity and students' interest in learning

The findings of this study indicate that the level of creativity of Islamic Religious Education teachers at Muhammadiyah Pone Junior High School is in the category of quite good. This is reflected in the application of various learning methods, such as group discussions, educational games based on Islamic values, the use of Islamic videos, and direct practice of worship. The selection of teaching media is carried out by considering the characteristics of students and the relevance of the material, so that learning is contextual and close to the reality of students' daily lives. This creativity has a real impact on increasing students' interest in learning, which is generally in the high category. Students show enthusiasm, active involvement in the learning process, excitement in taking lessons, and initiative in asking questions and completing assigned assignments. Overall, the results of this study confirm the existence of a positive and significant relationship between teachers' creativity in teaching and students' learning interests, which at the same time supports the conceptual framework built in this study.

These findings are in line with and reinforce the study conducted by Fadilah and Darodjat [37] which revealed that the creativity of Islamic Religious Education teachers in integrating learning media plays a significant role in increasing students' interest and understanding of religious materials. Next Syafa and Mukhrij [38] also emphasized that in the context of Islamic Religious Education learning in the digital era, an innovative approach is needed so that the learning process remains interesting and able to avoid students from boredom. Support also comes from research Wiguna et al. [39], which highlights the urgency of creative learning strategies in shaping fun and meaningful learning experiences for students.

However, the results of this study show a difference in the context of the findings when compared to the study conducted by Bahtiar et al. [40], which emphasizes the creativity of Islamic religious education teachers in utilizing various learning media so as to increase students' activeness and positive response to Islamic religious lessons. In the context of junior secondary education, this study emphasizes that teachers' creativity needs to go beyond just play activities, by emphasizing the importance of material relevance to adolescent lives as well as the application of reflective approaches and value discussions in more depth. In addition, these findings also expand the results of the study Muchtar and Makhshun [41], that animated videos or Islamic learning videos increase students' interest, creativity, and understanding in the Akidah/Aqidah or Al-Qur'an map, so that the effect is fast and real qualitatively. On the contrary, in this study, it was found that teachers' consistency in implementing adaptive creative strategies, accompanied by warm interpersonal interactions, contributes to shaping students' interest in learning in a sustainable and more in-depth manner.

Thus, the findings in this study make a significant contribution to the development of educational studies, especially in optimizing the learning of Islamic Religious Education at the junior high school level. The results of this study confirm that teachers' creativity cannot be seen as an additional aspect, but is the main component in fostering students' interest in learning. This is very relevant in the context of religious-based educational institutions, such as Muhammadiyah Pone Junior High School, where the role of teachers as creative facilitators also determines the success of learning. Teachers who have high creativity are able to create a lively learning atmosphere, build emotional closeness with students, and contextualize teaching materials to make them more meaningful for students. Therefore, increasing professional capacity and developing teachers' creativity must be a priority in Islamic Religious Education teacher training programs. Teachers need to be encouraged to continue to explore innovative pedagogical approaches, integrate technology appropriately, and understand students' psychological dynamics to ensure that learning interests can develop sustainably.

The impact of the limitations of this research lies in the narrow focus, which only highlights the influence of teachers' creativity on students' learning interests in Islamic Religious Education subjects at certain junior high school levels. This condition makes it difficult to generalize the results to other schools with different cultures, facilities, or managerial support. In addition, the study did not in-depth examine other factors that also affect learning interests, such as the role of parents or the school climate, so the results obtained are still partial. The limited duration of the study also makes the data reflect more of a momentary condition than a long-term picture.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the contribution of teachers' creativity in learning Islamic Religious Education to increase students' interest in learning at the Muhammadiyah Pone Junior High School level. Based on the findings and results of the analysis that have been carried out, it can be concluded that the creativity of teachers in the learning process of Islamic Religious Education has a significant contribution to increasing students' interest

in learning. Teachers who are able to design diverse learning strategies, utilize attractive educational media, and integrate teaching materials with the reality of students' daily lives, tend to succeed in creating a positive, fun, and meaningful learning atmosphere. Pedagogical innovations applied through contextual, interactive, and communicative approaches have been proven to encourage active student participation, increase the spirit of learning, and foster a deeper interest in Islamic Religious Education subjects.

This study emphasizes that the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education learning is not solely determined by the substance of the material presented, but is greatly influenced by the teacher's ability to design and present learning innovatively and creatively. These findings make a significant contribution to the development of Islamic education studies, especially in the context of increasing students' interest in learning through a pedagogical approach that is adaptive to the characteristics of junior high school students. Thus, teacher creativity can be positioned as a fundamental element in shaping a learning process that is not only efficient, but also able to have a long-term positive impact on student engagement and learning motivation.

Based on the results of the research and analysis of research findings, it is recommended that Islamic Religious Education teachers always increase creativity in the learning process through active participation in professional training, self-competency development, and pedagogical collaboration with fellow educators. Schools are expected to play an active role in creating an ecosystem that supports learning innovation, by providing facilities, infrastructure, and creative spaces that are relevant and responsive to the needs of teachers and students. Further research is suggested to broaden the focus of the study to include other variables, such as parental roles, school climate, and managerial support, in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the factors that influence students' learning interests. In addition, it is necessary to conduct research with a wider scope at various levels and types of educational units to strengthen the generalization of findings and examine the long-term impact of teachers' creativity not only on learning interests, but also on academic achievement and character formation of students.

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