

Teacher Creativity in Islamic Religious Education: Enhancing Students' Learning Interest in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to examine how teacher creativity in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) influences students' learning interest in elementary schools. The focus is on the ways teachers design, implement, and adapt teaching strategies to foster active engagement and motivation in learning.

Method: A qualitative descriptive approach was employed. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and documentation at SDN No. 23 Centre Takalar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Participants included one IRE teacher, the school principal, and fourth-grade students.

Findings: The results indicate that teacher creativity significantly contributes to increasing students' interest in learning IRE. Teachers utilized varied methods such as lectures, discussions, demonstrations, and task assignments, often integrated with interactive media. This combination encouraged students to participate actively and improved their overall enthusiasm toward IRE lessons.

Significance: The study highlights the importance of teacher creativity in shaping effective religious education practices. It provides insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers to strengthen creative pedagogical approaches in fostering students' motivation and character building.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a central role in shaping individuals' intellectual and moral development. In Islamic contexts, education is not merely the transfer of knowledge but also a means of cultivating values and religious practices that form students' character. One of the key challenges in contemporary education is how teachers can design learning processes that stimulate students' motivation and active participation. Without adequate creativity from teachers, learning often becomes monotonous, leading to low engagement among students. Therefore, teacher creativity has become an essential factor in ensuring effective learning in religious education.

Creativity in teaching is broadly understood as the ability to generate new ideas, methods, or solutions that enhance the learning process. Scholars such as Guilford emphasize creativity as divergent thinking that encourages exploring multiple perspectives in problem-solving. In the context of Islamic Religious Education (IRE), creativity manifests in how teachers combine teaching methods, utilize media, and develop strategies tailored to the diverse needs of learners. A creative teacher is expected to create a classroom atmosphere that is not only informative but also engaging and motivating, thus enabling students to develop both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning.

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Several studies in Indonesia have highlighted challenges in IRE learning, including students' low interest and the reliance on traditional lecture methods. For instance, Mulyasa (2013) and Djamarah & Zain (2010) argue that the overuse of conventional methods often results in student boredom and disengagement. Conversely, when teachers incorporate innovative strategies such as interactive discussions, multimedia, and contextual examples, students demonstrate higher levels of enthusiasm. These findings suggest that teacher creativity is a critical determinant in enhancing learning outcomes, particularly in subjects that require active participation and reflection like IRE.

Interest in learning is a psychological factor that influences students' willingness to engage with educational material. According to Sardiman (2007), learning interest encompasses attention, enthusiasm, and the desire to participate actively in class. In the case of IRE, fostering interest is vital because it not only affects academic achievement but also students' long-term commitment to practicing religious values. Teachers must therefore develop strategies that stimulate students' intrinsic motivation, ensuring that learning is perceived as both meaningful and enjoyable.

The Indonesian government, through national education standards, emphasizes the importance of active, innovative, creative, effective, and joyful learning (PAIKEM). This paradigm requires teachers to adopt pedagogical approaches that foster critical thinking, collaboration, and personal growth. Within the scope of IRE, this translates into teachers' responsibility to contextualize religious teachings, relate them to students' daily experiences, and present lessons in an engaging manner. Hence, the investigation of teacher creativity in fostering students' learning interest becomes both timely and necessary, especially in elementary schools where foundational attitudes toward religion are developed.

Given this background, the present study seeks to explore how creativity in teaching contributes to enhancing students' interest in IRE at the elementary level. Specifically, the study investigates the strategies employed by teachers, the observable effects on students, and the broader implications for religious education practice. By examining the case of SDN No. 23 Centre Takalar, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on creative pedagogy in Islamic education and provides practical insights for improving the quality of teaching and learning.

METHOD

Research Design

This study applied a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the role of teacher creativity in enhancing students' interest in learning Islamic Religious Education. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to capture the depth of participants' experiences, classroom dynamics, and contextual factors that cannot be fully explained through quantitative methods. By employing this design, the study focused on describing actual classroom practices, interpreting meanings behind teacher actions, and understanding how these strategies influenced students' engagement in the learning process.

Participants

The participants in this research consisted of an Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teacher, the school principal, and fourth-grade students of SDN No. 23 Centre Takalar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The teacher served as the main subject of analysis, while the principal provided contextual insights into the school's environment. The fourth-grade students were selected as they directly experienced the teacher's creative strategies in the classroom. This combination of participants provided a holistic perspective on both the instructional process and its effects on students' learning interest.

Instruments

Data collection was conducted using three primary instruments: interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. The interview guide was developed to gather in-depth information from the teacher, principal, and students about their experiences and perceptions of teaching and learning. Classroom observation sheets were used to record real-time activities, including teacher strategies, student responses, and interaction patterns. Documentation such as lesson plans, student assignments, and assessment records were analyzed to complement and validate findings from interviews and observations. These instruments were carefully designed to ensure reliability and capture a comprehensive understanding of the research focus.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which involves three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by organizing and simplifying raw information into relevant categories, particularly focusing on aspects of teacher creativity and student learning interest. Data display was achieved by presenting key findings in descriptive narratives, making it easier to identify emerging themes. Finally, conclusions were drawn through verification, ensuring that interpretations were consistent with the evidence collected from multiple sources. Triangulation among interviews, observations, and documentation enhanced the validity and credibility of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this study reveal that the creativity of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers plays a significant role in shaping students' learning interest. Classroom observations indicated that the teacher did not rely solely on traditional lecturing but instead integrated multiple methods such as group discussions, demonstrations, and task assignments. This variation in teaching approaches made the classroom atmosphere more dynamic and interactive, reducing student boredom and creating a positive learning environment. Students were more willing to participate, ask questions, and contribute ideas during lessons, demonstrating the impact of creative teaching strategies on engagement.

In addition to teaching methods, the use of instructional media emerged as an important factor in enhancing students' motivation. Teachers employed visual aids and interactive materials that helped to explain abstract religious concepts in more concrete ways. For example, charts, pictures, and contextual examples were used to support lessons,

which not only attracted students’ attention but also facilitated better comprehension. The integration of teaching media proved to be a valuable tool in increasing enthusiasm and ensuring that students remained focused throughout the learning process.

Furthermore, students’ learning interest showed noticeable improvement as a result of these creative practices. Interviews and observations revealed that students became more attentive, enthusiastic, and motivated to learn. The combination of varied methods and media created a supportive learning atmosphere that encouraged active participation. Students’ positive responses indicated that creativity in teaching not only improved classroom interaction but also fostered a deeper appreciation for IRE subjects. Overall, these findings confirm that teacher creativity is a key factor in promoting student engagement and academic success in religious education. The main findings of the study can be summarized in the table 1 below:

Table 1. the Findings of Research

Aspects Observed	Findings
Teacher Creativity in Teaching Methods	Teachers applied varied methods such as lectures, discussions, demonstrations, and assignments.
Use of Teaching Media	Visual aids and other instructional media were used to support understanding and motivation.
Student Learning Interest	Students showed increased attentiveness, active participation, and enthusiasm during IRE lessons.
Combination of Teaching Strategies	Creative integration of multiple strategies made learning more engaging and reduced student boredom.

Discussion

The results confirm that teacher creativity plays a vital role in fostering students’ learning interest. This finding aligns with Mulyasa (2013), who emphasizes that professional teachers must create joyful and interactive learning environments. The observed increase in student enthusiasm suggests that creative pedagogical practices directly influence motivation, validating previous research on the positive correlation between innovative teaching and learning interest.

Similar findings have been reported by Ismail (2008), who demonstrated that the use of varied teaching methods in IRE enhances student engagement. In the present study, the teacher’s use of diverse strategies such as group discussions and demonstrations mirrored this approach, resulting in improved student attentiveness. This suggests that methodological diversity is a cornerstone of effective creative teaching.

Furthermore, the integration of teaching media supports the argument of Arsyad (2004), who asserts that instructional media improve comprehension and stimulate motivation. The teacher in this study effectively utilized visual aids to capture students’ attention and make abstract religious concepts more concrete. Such practices highlight the necessity of equipping IRE teachers with resources and training in media-based instruction.

The study also resonates with research by Munandar (2004), who argues that creativity is characterized by originality, fluency, and flexibility. The teacher’s ability to adapt teaching strategies according to classroom dynamics illustrates these creative traits.

Students benefited from the variety and novelty of approaches, demonstrating the importance of teacher adaptability in fostering sustained interest.

Moreover, the role of creativity in IRE should be understood within the broader educational objective of character formation. As noted by Naim (2011), creative teachers inspire students not only to learn but also to internalize values. In this case, fostering students' interest in IRE is not solely about academic outcomes but also about encouraging them to practice Islamic values in daily life. This expands the significance of creativity beyond classroom performance to long-term personal development.

Finally, the findings support the PAIKEM framework, which emphasizes active and enjoyable learning. The case study demonstrates that teacher creativity operationalizes this framework effectively in IRE contexts. Future studies should further investigate how creativity interacts with other factors such as school culture, student background, and curriculum design to maximize its impact on student learning interest.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teacher creativity in Islamic Religious Education significantly enhances students' interest in learning. By employing varied methods, integrating media, and fostering interactive learning, teachers can create an engaging classroom environment that motivates students. The findings underscore the importance of developing teachers' creative capacities to improve both academic and affective outcomes in religious education.

AUHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Jadwalina Masthuri: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Collection, Formal Analysis, and Writing – Original Draft.

Rusli Malli: Validation, Literature Review, Data Curation, and Writing – Review & Editing.

St. Rajiah Rusydi: Supervision, Project Administration, and Final Approval of the Manuscript.

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