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Innovation of madrasa teacher teaching: Transformation of teacher teaching creativity through performance and motivation engagement in teaching and learning

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Abstract: This study explores the relationship between teaching creativity, teacher performance, and motivational engagement among madrasa *tsanawiya* (Islamic junior high school) teachers in the context of Islamic Religious Education. Using a qualitative case-study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, madrasa heads, and students, supported by classroom observations and document analysis. The findings indicate that teaching creativity is shaped by teachers' intrinsic motivation—rooted both in spiritual commitment and professional responsibility—as well as their performance in managing classrooms, designing instructional strategies, and facilitating student engagement. Teachers who demonstrate strong motivation and pedagogical competence are more likely to develop creative, contextualized, and student-centered instructional practices. However, challenges such as limited resources, insufficient training, administrative workload, and concerns about alignment with traditional expectations often hinder creative pedagogical implementation. The study concludes that teaching creativity flourishes most effectively within supportive institutional environments that provide professional development, leadership encouragement, and technological resources. The findings offer important implications for policy development, teacher training, and the advancement of pedagogical innovation in Islamic educational institutions.

Keywords: teaching creativity, Islamic Religious Education, teacher motivation, teacher performance, madrasa innovation

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1. Introduction

Innovation in teaching has become an essential requirement for strengthening the quality of Islamic education, particularly within the madrasa system. As 21st-century learning increasingly demands creativity, adaptability, and learner-centered pedagogical approaches, madrasa teachers are expected to move beyond traditional, lecture-based instruction and embrace more dynamic, engaging, and transformative teaching practices. The rapid development of digital technologies, the diversification of student needs, and the growing expectations placed upon Islamic educational institutions further underscore the urgent need for instructional innovation (Tambak et al., 2021; Harpeni Dewantara, 2020:15). In this context, teaching creativity—defined as a teacher's ability to design, implement, and adapt instructional strategies that stimulate higher-order thinking, meaningful learning, and active participation—emerges as a critical competency for madrasa educators. Creative teaching enables teachers to contextualize Islamic knowledge, integrate modern pedagogical approaches, and respond effectively to students' intellectual and emotional needs. However, creativity in teaching does not develop in isolation; it is shaped by teachers' performance capabilities, professional commitment, and, importantly, their motivation engagement in teaching and learning.

Recent scholarship on teacher innovation has increasingly emphasized the pivotal role of creativity, motivation, and performance in reshaping instructional practices within diverse educational contexts. In global educational research, teaching innovation is recognized as a multidimensional construct that integrates pedagogical creativity, learner-centered instruction, and adaptive use of technology to promote meaningful learning (Tambak, & Sukenti, 2025; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Evans & Boucher, 2015). As educational systems shift toward competency-based and active-learning paradigms, teachers are expected not merely to deliver content but to create engaging, interactive learning environments that cultivate students' cognitive, emotional, and social development. Within Islamic education, particularly in madrasa settings, the demand for teaching innovation has grown significantly. Traditional teacher-centered models remain prevalent in many madrasas, often limiting opportunities for critical inquiry, higher-order thinking, and active participation. Recent studies highlight the need for transforming madrasa pedagogy into more creative, student-responsive instructional models that integrate both religious values and contemporary educational frameworks (Tambak & Sukenti, 2024; Muhajir et al., 2025).

This transition requires teachers to develop creative teaching competencies that enable flexible adaptation of instructional strategies, innovative lesson design, and contextualized teaching aligned with Islamic epistemology. A growing body of research identifies teacher performance—including pedagogical knowledge, mastery of content, and classroom management—as a fundamental factor influencing teaching innovation. High-performing teachers are more likely to integrate novel teaching approaches, utilize technology effectively, and create learning environments conducive to exploration and independent thinking (Zhang et al., 2024; Tambak et al., 2021). Teacher performance provides the structural foundation upon which creativity and innovation can flourish. Simultaneously, teacher motivation engagement has emerged as a central determinant of creative teaching behavior. Motivated teachers exhibit greater enthusiasm, persistence, and willingness to experiment with new instructional ideas. Motivation drives teachers to engage in reflective practice, pursue professional development, and adopt innovative teaching models that enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Ahn et al., 2021; Basileo et al., 2024). Studies have also shown that intrinsic motivation encourages teachers to introduce active-learning strategies, collaborative tasks, and problem-solving activities—elements that are essential for creative instructional transformation.

However, despite these global trends, empirical research focusing specifically on the innovation of teaching within madrasa education remains limited. Existing studies often address broader pedagogical issues such as teacher professionalism, Islamic values integration, or curriculum reform (Firdaus et al., 2025; Namora et al., 2025), yet relatively few examine how teacher creativity emerges from the interplay between performance and motivational engagement. Moreover, investigations exploring these dynamics within Southeast Asian madrasas—particularly in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Brunei—are still sparse, revealing a critical gap in the literature. Motivation engagement, which encompasses emotional investment, enthusiasm for teaching, persistence in overcoming instructional challenges, and a proactive attitude toward professional development, plays a pivotal role in determining the extent to which teachers innovate. Teachers who are highly

motivated are more likely to experiment with new teaching techniques, integrate technology into their lessons, and adopt student-centered learning models that enhance classroom interaction and foster positive learning outcomes. Conversely, low motivation often results in repetitive teaching patterns, resistance to innovation, and limited instructional effectiveness.

Teacher performance is equally influential in facilitating creative instructional transformation. High-performing teachers demonstrate strong pedagogical knowledge, classroom management skills, and curriculum mastery—all of which support the effective implementation of innovative teaching strategies. When teacher performance and motivational engagement work in tandem, they create a powerful foundation for sustained teaching creativity and instructional excellence. Despite its importance, empirical research on the innovation of teaching within madrasa settings remains limited, particularly in examining how teacher performance and motivation engagement interact to shape creative teaching practices. Much of the existing literature focuses on general pedagogical challenges in Islamic schools, while insufficient attention is given to the mechanisms that enable teachers to transform their instructional approaches in response to contemporary educational demands.

The present study seeks to address this gap by exploring how madrasa teachers' performance and motivation engagement contribute to the teacher teaching creativity. Understanding this relationship is crucial for developing targeted professional development programs, fostering a culture of pedagogical innovation, and enhancing the overall quality of teaching and learning in madrasas. Ultimately, strengthening teachers' creativity, performance, and motivational engagement can help Islamic educational institutions nurture future generations who are academically competent, spiritually grounded, and capable of contributing meaningfully to society. Therefore, this research focuses on three aspects: (1) teachers' understanding of teaching creativity in Islamic Religious Education (IRE), (2) the relationship between teaching creativity and teacher performance in IRE, and (3) the relationship between teaching creativity and teacher motivation in teaching IRE.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher performance

Teacher performance is a central construct in educational research, widely recognized as a key determinant of teaching effectiveness, student outcomes, and overall school quality. It encompasses a teacher's ability to plan instruction, deliver engaging lessons, manage the classroom, assess learning, and continuously improve through reflective practice. In contemporary educational discourse, teacher performance is viewed not simply as task execution but as a dynamic integration of pedagogical knowledge, instructional competence, professional attitudes, and adaptive decision-making (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). High-performing teachers demonstrate strong mastery of subject content, pedagogical strategies, and classroom management, enabling them to create structured yet flexible learning environments that support students' cognitive and emotional development. Such teachers are more likely to adopt varied instructional approaches—ranging from inquiry-based and collaborative learning to differentiated instruction—thereby enhancing students' motivation, engagement, and academic achievement (Hattie, 2009; Pedler et al., 2020). Teacher performance, therefore, significantly shapes the quality of interaction between teachers and learners and contributes directly to the effectiveness of learning processes.

In Islamic educational contexts, including madrasas, teacher performance is closely linked to both academic and moral responsibilities. Teachers are expected not only to convey subject matter effectively but also to model Islamic values, uphold professional ethics, and nurture students' spiritual and intellectual growth. Studies indicate that strong teacher performance in Islamic education leads to improved student discipline, deeper understanding of religious content, and greater engagement in learning activities (Tambak & Sukenti, 2024; Firdaus et al., 2025). The dual role of madrasa teachers—as educators and moral exemplars—places additional emphasis on the need for consistently high professional performance.

Several factors influence teacher performance. One notable factor is teacher motivation, which has been shown to predict the extent to which teachers invest effort, persist through challenges, and implement effective teaching strategies. Motivated teachers are more likely to set clear instructional goals, prepare high-quality lessons, and engage in continuous professional development. Basileo et al. (2024) found that motivation significantly improves teachers' self-efficacy and commitment, both of which contribute to higher levels of performance in classroom practice. Additionally, self-efficacy plays a crucial role in shaping teacher performance. Teachers with strong beliefs in their capabilities tend to organize learning more effectively, manage classrooms confidently, and respond flexibly to student needs. They demonstrate greater resilience when facing instructional difficulties and are more open to implementing innovative teaching methods (Honicke et al., 2023). In madrasa settings, self-efficacy has been linked to improved religious pedagogy, stronger integration of Islamic values, and enhanced instructional clarity.

Organizational factors such as leadership support, professional development opportunities, and school climate also have a substantial impact on teacher performance. Schools that provide supportive leadership, collaborative learning environments, and access to continuous training tend to report higher teacher performance and improved educational quality (Evans & Boucher, 2015; Cronqvist, 2022). In many madrasas, however, limited access to modern resources and professional training remains a barrier to optimal performance, underscoring the need for targeted reforms. Empirical studies in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, highlight ongoing challenges in madrasa teacher performance, including insufficient training in modern pedagogical methods, reliance on traditional lecture-based instruction, and limited integration of technology (Namora et al., 2025; Yasin et al., 2025). Nevertheless, recent reforms and capacity-building initiatives have begun to improve teacher performance, leading to more creative and student-centered instructional practices.

Overall, the literature affirms that teacher performance is foundational to educational innovation, especially in madrasa settings where teachers play a transformative role in shaping both academic learning and moral character. Improving teacher performance requires a holistic approach that strengthens teacher motivation, enhances professional skills, and fosters supportive institutional environments. Continued research is needed to explore how teacher performance interacts with creativity, technology integration, and motivation engagement in shaping innovative teaching practices within the madrasa system.

2.2. Motivation engagement

Motivation engagement is a multidimensional construct that describes the degree to which learners (or teachers) are behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively invested in learning and instructional activity. Over the past three decades educational researchers have conceptualized engagement as central to learning outcomes, persistence, and the effective application of pedagogical innovation (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Contemporary scholarship conceptualizes engagement as comprising three interrelated components: behavioral engagement (participation, effort, on-task behavior), emotional engagement (interest, enjoyment, sense of belonging), and cognitive engagement (use of deep learning strategies, metacognitive regulation). These components interact with motivational processes—such as intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy beliefs, and value appraisals—to determine the quality and durability of students' learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Fredricks et al., 2004).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a dominant theoretical lens linking motivation to engagement. SDT posits that environments supporting basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster intrinsic motivation and deeper engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Empirical studies confirm that autonomy-supportive instructional climates—where learners experience meaningful choice and explanatory feedback—increase intrinsic motivation and promote sustained cognitive engagement (Ahn, Chiu, & Patrick, 2021; Evans & Boucher, 2015). In classroom settings, teacher behaviors that provide structure while supporting autonomy and relatedness reliably predict

higher levels of student engagement and learning outcomes (Ahn et al., 2021). Academic self-efficacy and motivational beliefs are tightly coupled with engagement. Students with higher self-efficacy exert greater effort, persist longer when tasks are difficult, and are likelier to employ metacognitive strategies that enhance learning (Honicke, Broadbent, & Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, 2023; Zimmerman, 2000). Longitudinal and experimental evidence indicates that increases in self-efficacy precede gains in both behavioral persistence and the adoption of deep learning strategies—outcomes that characterize cognitive engagement (Zimmerman, 2000; Honicke et al., 2023).

Recent research also examines engagement as an outcome of teacher practices and institutional conditions. Teacher motivation and the quality of teacher performance (pedagogical skill, feedback quality, and classroom management) influence student engagement indirectly by shaping the learning climate (Basileo et al., 2024; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). For example, teachers who are motivated, professionally competent, and supported by leadership are more likely to design lessons that elicit active participation and cognitive challenge—thereby improving all three engagement dimensions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Pedler, Yeigh, & Hudson, 2020). In technology-mediated and online environments, engagement depends on both motivational design and self-regulatory capacities. Studies show that platforms and instructional designs that scaffold self-regulated learning (clear goals, timely feedback, interactive tasks) increase cognitive engagement and reduce disengagement (Zhao & Liu, 2022; Lee et al., 2024). These findings underline the importance of combining motivational supports (autonomy, value, competence feedback) with structural supports (scaffolds, exemplars) to translate motivation into sustained engagement.

In Islamic education and madrasa settings, the literature is expanding but remains comparatively limited. Emerging studies indicate that culturally situated motivational factors—such as alignment between curricula and religious values, teacher modeling of Islamic ethics, and community expectations—shape both intrinsic motivation and engagement (Tambak & Sukenti, 2024; Firdaus et al., 2025). Because madrasas often integrate spiritual formation with cognitive instruction, motivation engagement in these contexts is influenced by both academic value appraisals and religious meaning, suggesting a dual pathway by which engagement can be cultivated: pedagogical (skill, autonomy, scaffolding) and value-based (religious relevance and moral identity).

Finally, recent meta-analytic and empirical research highlights practical levers to raise motivation engagement: (1) autonomy-supportive instruction to foster intrinsic motivation; (2) targeted interventions to boost self-efficacy (mastery experiences, formative feedback); (3) professional development that enhances teacher performance and motivational climates; and (4) instructional design that integrates scaffolds for self-regulated learning (Basileo et al., 2024; Ahn et al., 2021; Fredricks et al., 2004). Together these approaches show consistent positive effects on behavioral persistence, cognitive strategy use, and emotional investment—hallmarks of strong motivation engagement.

2.3. Teacher teaching creativity

Teacher teaching creativity is commonly defined as the teacher's capacity to generate, adapt, and implement novel instructional ideas, methods, or materials that produce pedagogically useful outcomes in specific classroom contexts. This is distinct from student creativity (what students create) and from creativity as a personality trait; instead, teacher creativity is a situated, professional competence that blends pedagogical content knowledge, improvisation, and risk-taking in practice (Beghetto, 2012). Beghetto's synthesis emphasizes that creative teaching comprises both *creative teaching* (teachers' enactments that are novel for the classroom) and *teaching for creativity* (practices that cultivate students' creative potential).

Contemporary models conceptualize teacher creativity as multi-dimensional. Researchers emphasize at least three interrelated components: (1) cognitive elements (flexible use of knowledge, divergent thinking applied to pedagogy), (2) affective-motivational elements (willingness to take

professional risks, openness to experimentation), and (3) contextual elements (school culture, resources, and leadership that enable or constrain creative practice). Massie et al. (2022) argue that professional coherence—alignment between a teacher's values, expertise, and institutional expectations—creates conditions that permit "beautiful risks," i.e., pedagogically creative acts that may disrupt routines but yield meaningful learning gains. A growing empirical literature links teacher creativity to improved classroom engagement, student motivation, and learning outcomes across domains (mathematics, language, science, and religious education). Studies in primary and secondary settings report positive correlations between teachers' self-reported creative practices and students' interest, on-task behavior, and achievement; qualitative research likewise documents richer classroom discourse and more open problem framing when teachers employ creative strategies (e.g., authentic tasks, multimodal resources, and scaffolded inquiry). However, effect sizes and robustness vary with context: constrained curricula, high-stakes testing, and limited resources frequently attenuate the observable impact of creative teaching (Bereczki, & Kárpáti, 2018).

Evidence indicates that teacher creativity can be cultivated through targeted professional development (PD) that combines modeling of creative practices, opportunities for collaborative lesson design, and iterative reflection. PD programs that promote *disciplined improvisation*—structured routines with room for teacher adaptation—are particularly effective because they give teachers both scaffolding and license to innovate (Beghetto 2012) literature summarized in empirical reviews). Organizational factors—transformational leadership, supportive school culture, and curriculum flexibility—are repeatedly shown to moderate the translation of teacher creativity into classroom practice; where schools reward experimentation and tolerate productive failure, creativity flourishes. The literature identifies several recurring barriers: time pressure and overloaded syllabi; performance accountability regimes that privilege convergent answers over original solutions; limited access to instructional resources and technology; and teacher beliefs that creativity is an innate trait rather than a teachable practice. Systematic reviews note that many teachers endorse democratic views of creativity (believing most students can be creative) while simultaneously reporting uncertainty about how to operationalize creativity in day-to-day lessons—an implementation gap that PD must address (Massie et al., 2022; Bereczki, & Kárpáti, 2018).

Methodologically, teacher creativity research comprises qualitative case studies, cross-sectional surveys, and emerging meta-analytic work. A notable gap is longitudinal and classroom-observation research that links specific creative teacher behaviors to student learning trajectories over time. Additionally, much of the robust conceptual work (e.g., Beghetto, 2012) has not yet been fully operationalized into validated instruments used across cultural contexts; this is important for comparative research in settings such as madrasas or vocational teacher education where cultural conceptions of creativity differ. Recent vocational-teacher education research highlights the need to unpack disciplinary differences (how creativity shows up in vocational vs. academic subjects), a useful direction for future work. Taken together, the literature supports three practical recommendations: (1) design PD that combines concrete creative techniques (e.g., task design prompts, multimodal materials) with reflective inquiry and collaborative lesson development; (2) align school assessment and accountability policies so that they reward creative problem solving and process-oriented outcomes as well as correctness; and (3) build organizational supports—time for co-planning, leadership that models risk tolerance, and access to low-cost materials and digital tools—to lower the barriers that prevent teachers from trying new approaches. When implemented coherently, these elements increase the likelihood that teacher creativity will translate into improved student engagement and deeper learning (Massie et al., 2022).

3. Method

3.1. Research design

The type of study used in research is a qualitative study with case study approach (Lundh, 2020). A qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of this research is to explore a deeper

understanding of complex phenomena, such as how teachers' performance and motivation can influence their teaching creativity (Patton, 2002; Groenewald, 2018). This research aims to understand teachers' perceptions, experiences and attitudes related to the learning process they carry out as well as the factors that influence their creativity in teaching. Through this approach, it is hoped that researchers can reveal deeper and more nuanced themes related to teaching creativity.

3.2. Participant

The participants of this research were *madrasah tsanawiyah* (Islamic junior high school) teachers, the school principal, and students in Pekanbaru. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006), involving 12 madrasa teachers, 2 school principals, and 15 students to gather information about teacher performance and motivation in the learning process. These interviews provided direct insight into the factors influencing teacher creativity in teaching, as well as how students perceive the learning methods applied. In addition to interviews, secondary data were also used, including school documents, teacher performance evaluation reports, and notes on the development of learning creativity taken from classroom observations. These data were used to support the analysis and provide a more comprehensive picture of classroom dynamics.

The main data sources in research on the teaching creativity of madrasa teachers which involve teacher performance and motivation in learning come from teachers, school principals and students. Teachers are the main data source because they are the direct subjects who carry out the learning process and are responsible for the creativity applied in the classroom. Interviews with teachers will explore information about their perceptions of creativity in teaching, the challenges they face in increasing creativity, as well as factors that influence their performance and motivation in teaching. School principals are also an important source of data because they have a role in supporting and facilitating teachers in developing creativity and can provide insight into school policies and support for developing teaching creativity.

3.3. Data collection technique

In research on the teaching creativity of madrasa teachers which involves teacher performance and motivation in learning, the data collection techniques used were in-depth interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lundh, 2020). In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, principals and students to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence teaching creativity. This interview is designed to explore the perceptions, experiences and challenges faced by teachers in creating creative learning methods and how their performance and motivation play a role in this process. These interviews are semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in exploring relevant topics during the conversation.

3.4. Data analysis

The process and stages of data analysis in research on the teaching creativity of madrasa teachers which involves teacher performance and motivation begins with the data transcription stage (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lundh, 2020). After data is collected through in-depth interviews and observations, the first step is to transcribe all interviews and record the results of observations to ensure that the information obtained can be analyzed systematically. This transcription is then checked to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data that has been collected. Next, the written data is organized and separated based on categories that are relevant to the research focus, such as teaching creativity, teacher performance, teacher motivation, and interactions with students.

The next stage is thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lundh, 2020; Aşdelen Teker & Güler, 2019), where the researcher identifies patterns or themes that emerge from the data. This process involved a thorough reading of interview transcripts and observation notes, then categorizing the

information based on topics relevant to the research questions. The main themes discovered, such as factors that support or hinder teaching creativity, the impact of motivation on teacher performance, and how classroom dynamics contribute to the application of creativity, were further explored. After that, the researcher interpreted the findings by linking them to relevant theories and comparing them with previous research. This analysis was carried out iteratively, with revisions and testing of findings based on available data, to ensure that the analysis results were valid and comprehensive.

4. Result

4.1. Teaching creativity in Islamic Religious Education

Most madrasa teachers (10 out of 12) acknowledged that teaching creativity involves adapting Islamic concepts into engaging, meaningful, and contextually relevant learning activities. However, several teachers admitted that their understanding of creativity was still limited to "making learning interesting," without fully recognizing creativity as a pedagogical skill involving innovation, instructional flexibility, and problem-solving.

"Creativity means finding different ways to explain religious values so students can apply them in daily life" (Teacher 4)

"I know creativity is important, but sometimes I only think of it as decorating the class or using slides" (Teacher 8)

Eight teachers emphasized that creativity is not only a teaching approach but also a responsibility to convey Islamic teachings effectively. They believed that creativity enables them to integrate Qur'anic verses, hadith, stories of the prophets, and moral lessons in ways that resonate with contemporary students.

"Our duty is to make Islamic knowledge alive, not just memorized. Creativity helps us do that" (Teacher 2)

Teachers highlighted several constraints: Heavy teaching loads and limited preparation time. Lack of training in modern pedagogical methods. Insufficient digital resources in many madrasas. Perception that creativity may compromise discipline or traditional values. One teacher commented:

"I want to be creative, but I am afraid that some methods might look too modern, and parents may not understand" (Teacher 9)

Both madrasa heads agreed that creative teaching is crucial for improving students' understanding of Islamic teachings and moral development. However, they admitted that existing professional development programs were not specifically designed to strengthen teachers' creative competencies.

"We encourage innovative teaching, but we need more structured training to guide teachers" (Madrasa Head 1)

The heads identified the following barriers: Limited budget for resources and technology. Difficulty shifting from traditional lecture-based methods. Lack of systematic evaluation for creative teaching practices. Despite these challenges, both leaders expressed commitment to creating a supportive organizational culture that empowers teachers to experiment with new instructional approaches.

Almost all students (13 out of 15) expressed that creative teaching methods—such as storytelling, group discussions, project-based tasks, role play, and multimedia content—make IRE more enjoyable, memorable, and meaningful.

"When ustadz tells stories and connects them to real life, it's easier to understand Islam" (Student 6)

Students mentioned that activities encouraging collaboration, reflection, and critical thinking help them internalize Islamic values rather than passively memorizing information.

"We learn better when the teacher gives examples from today's life, not just from books" (Student 11)

Many students expressed desire for: Visual learning materials. Short videos explaining Islamic history. Creative assignments (e.g., posters, digital presentations). Group problem-solving activities based on Islamic cases. One student said:

"We want more interactive learning. It makes us excited to come to IRE class" (Student 14)

4.2. Madrasa teachers' teaching creativity and its link to teacher performance

Across all participant groups, the interviews reveal a strong and consistent belief that teaching creativity is an integral component of teacher performance in Islamic Religious Education. Creativity makes learning more meaningful, supports spiritual and moral development, and enables teachers to fulfill their pedagogical and religious responsibilities. However, gaps remain in institutional support, training, and evaluation mechanisms, indicating a need for strategic reform to embed creativity more deeply into madrasa teaching culture and performance standards.

Teachers unanimously stated that creativity contributes directly to their professional performance. They identified several dimensions in which creativity elevates performance: Creative teachers invest more effort in: designing varied activities, preparing suitable resources, and connecting Islamic concepts to real-life examples. Teachers saw this as a sign of professionalism. Teachers reported that creative instruction helped them: explain complex Islamic topics more clearly, maintain student attention, and encourage student interaction. One teacher explained:

"A teacher who performs well is one who can teach in many ways so students understand" (Teacher 1)

Teachers stated that creative teaching naturally encourages them to: reflect on student engagement, adjust their methods, and continuously improve. This reflective cycle is central to strong teacher performance. Teachers reported feeling more confident and motivated when their creative strategies successfully improved student understanding. Several teachers described creativity as a "boost" that increases enthusiasm and personal fulfillment.

"When students enjoy my creative activities, I feel encouraged. It makes me want to prepare better next time" (Teacher 10)

Both madrasa heads viewed teaching creativity as a fundamental dimension of teacher performance. They emphasized that high-performing teachers: are flexible in their methods, adapt to student needs, integrate Islamic values meaningfully, and create learning environments that promote engagement. One leader commented:

"A great madrasa teacher is creative. Without creativity, students will not connect with Islamic lessons" (Head 1)

Despite their appreciation for creativity, madrasa heads admitted that current evaluation systems do not explicitly measure creativity. Teacher performance assessments still rely heavily on: punctuality, classroom discipline, completion of curriculum, and knowledge of Islamic content. Creativity is valued informally but not systematically integrated into performance appraisal (Head 2). The heads identified several issues limiting creativity: insufficient budget for teaching materials, limited technological support, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of consistent training in creative pedagogy (Head 1). They agreed that institutional reform is necessary for creativity to thrive.

Students expressed that they could tell when teachers used creative approaches. They enjoyed: storytelling, dramatization of historical events, group discussions, multimedia explanations, and real-life case studies from Islamic contexts. A student commented:

"When *ustadzah* uses stories and videos, I understand the lesson quickly" (Student 6)

Students associated creativity with teacher quality. They believed that creative teachers: explain better, make learning enjoyable, help them understand Islam deeply, and encourage participation. One student stated:

"I feel the teacher is excellent when they teach differently and make the class lively" (Student 11)

Students noted that creative teaching helped them internalize Islamic values: *"Creative teachers help us practice akhlaq, not only memorize it."* (Student 12). This moral impact is central to evaluating teacher performance in IRE.

4.3. Motivation engagement and its link to madrasa teacher performance

This section presents the thematic findings from interviews exploring how motivation engagement shapes and enhances madrasa teacher performance in IRE. The perspectives of madrasa teachers, madrasa heads, and students reveal a comprehensive view of how motivational factors influence teaching quality, instructional behavior, and overall professional effectiveness.

Motivation as spiritual and professional drive. Most teachers (10 of 12) described motivation engagement as a combination of spiritual intention (*niyyah*) and professional responsibility. In the IRE context, teaching is not merely a job, but an *ibadah* (act of worship). This spiritual element strengthens teachers' emotional and moral motivation. Sample teacher perspectives:

"When I teach with sincere intention for Allah, I feel motivated to give my best" (Teacher 5)

"Motivation in Islamic teaching comes from feeling responsible for students' *akhlaq*" (Teacher 2)

This spiritual component is unique to madrasa settings and strongly influences performance. Motivation as a response to students' need. Teachers frequently said they feel more motivated when students: show interest, participate actively, or demonstrate improved discipline and understanding.

"My motivation increases when students respond well. It strengthens my performance." (Teacher 9).

This reflects reciprocal motivation, in which teacher enthusiasm is reinforced by student engagement. Motivation linked to professional pride. Several teachers noted that motivation comes from: mastery of teaching skills, confidence in content knowledge, feeling respected in the school community, and being recognized as a competent educator. Six teachers highlighted that acknowledgment from principals or colleagues increases their motivation to prepare better lessons. Teachers with strong motivational engagement reported: preparing lessons earlier and more thoroughly, using diverse teaching materials, adopting more active learning strategies, and tailoring content to students' needs.

"When I am motivated, I prepare extra materials, stories, examples. My teaching becomes better" (Teacher 3)

Motivation drives proactive teaching behaviors, which are central to high performance. Teachers explained that motivation helps them remain patient and committed when facing: disruptive classroom behavior, lack of resources, curriculum pressure, or administrative workload. Motivated teachers stay calm, model *akhlaq*, and continue teaching effectively.

"Even when the class is difficult, motivation helps me keep trying" *(Teacher 10)*

Many teachers shared that motivation pushes them to: try new teaching methods, design creative activities, integrate stories and visual aids, experiment with technology. This shows that motivation fuels creativity, which in turn strengthens performance.

Motivation is a fundamental driver of teacher performance. Both madrasa heads emphasized that teacher motivation is one of the strongest predictors of high performance.

"A motivated teacher will automatically perform well—prepare better, teach better, and care more" (Head 2)

In their view, motivation determines: punctuality, preparedness, engagement with students, and consistency of lesson delivery. The heads identified the following motivational sources: religious commitment to teaching Islam, positive school culture, supportive leadership, student appreciation, and collegial collaboration. These elements either enhance or weaken teacher motivation. Despite recognizing its importance, madrasa heads admitted: there is no formal motivational support system in the institution, teacher workload sometimes reduces motivation, opportunities for professional development are limited. This gap weakens overall teacher performance.

Students' perspectives on motivation engagement and teacher performance. Students easily see when teachers are motivated. Students described motivated teachers as: enthusiastic, patient, active in explaining, able to make lessons enjoyable, and consistent in showing care. Student perspectives:

"When my teacher is motivated, we feel the energy. The class becomes alive" (Student 4)

"Motivated ustadz explains clearly and never gets tired of helping us" (Student 13)

Motivation enhances teaching quality. Students linked teacher motivation to: clearer explanations, more organized lessons, increased use of creative strategies, better understanding of Qur'an and hadith, and improved classroom discipline. Students repeatedly said that motivated teachers "teach from the heart," which increases performance. Students noted that motivated teachers have more influence on: their moral behavior, spiritual development, and feelings of closeness with religious content.

"When the teacher shows passion in teaching Islam, we feel more connected to the religion" (Student 9)

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the dynamics of teaching creativity among madrasa *tsanawiya* teachers, particularly in relation to teacher performance and motivation engagement. The results reveal that teaching creativity in IRE is shaped by a complex interaction of personal, pedagogical, and institutional factors. These findings align with and extend existing literature on instructional innovation, teacher motivation, and creative pedagogy, especially within Islamic educational settings.

First, the study shows that teachers conceptualize creativity primarily as the ability to transform Islamic concepts into meaningful, engaging, and contextually relevant learning experiences. This understanding affirms previous work suggesting that creative teaching involves more than aesthetic enhancements; it requires cognitive flexibility, pedagogical innovation, and the capacity to contextualize content meaningfully (Beghetto, 2012; Massie et al., 2022; Tambak et al., 2024). Teachers' emphasis on the responsibility to make Islamic teachings "alive" resonates with Islamic education scholarship which positions teachers as moral and spiritual guides tasked with fostering both cognitive and affective learning (Tambak & Sukenti, 2024). However, the limited conceptual depth reported by some teachers—such as viewing creativity merely as classroom decoration or use of slides—indicates persistent misconceptions consistent with global findings on the "implementation gap" in creative pedagogy (Bereczki & Kárpáti, 2018; Tambak, Ahmad, & Sukenti, 2020).

Second, the findings demonstrate strong linkages between teaching creativity and teacher performance. Creative teachers were described as more capable of explaining complex Islamic concepts, managing student engagement, and adapting instruction—a pattern also observed in general education contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Hattie, 2009). The reflective tendencies of creative teachers, who continuously refine their instructional approaches based on student responses, align with models of high-performing educators who integrate formative assessment, adaptive decision-making, and learner-centred methods (Pedler et al., 2020; Tambak et al., 2025). Yet, the study highlights a structural contradiction: while school leaders value creativity, it is not explicitly embedded in formal teacher performance evaluations. This finding echoes Cronqvist's (2022) critique of institutional conservatism in teacher education systems, where innovation is encouraged rhetorically but constrained by rigid assessment regimes.

Third, motivation engagement emerges as a critical driver of teacher creativity and performance. The data illuminate a distinctive motivational structure in Islamic educational settings: teachers derive motivation not only from professional aspirations but also from spiritual intention (niyyah) and the perceived responsibility to nurture students' *akhlaq*. This dual motivational pathway reflects earlier scholarship showing that religious values and moral purpose influence teacher enthusiasm and resilience in Islamic schools (Firdaus et al., 2025; Namora et al., 2025). The study further supports Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Tambak et al., 2025), showing that teachers' satisfaction of psychological needs—competence, relatedness, and autonomy—predicts their willingness to engage in creative and high-quality teaching. Teachers reported greater creativity when they felt appreciated, supported by leadership, and connected to students—consistent with findings from Ahn et al. (2021) highlighting the reciprocal nature of teacher–student motivational dynamics.

Students' perspectives corroborate the importance of creativity and teacher motivation. Their preference for storytelling, multimedia, role play, and project-based tasks underscores the need for varied pedagogical approaches to increase engagement and deepen understanding of Islamic teachings. These observations align with student engagement research demonstrating that creative instructional strategies enhance behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Basileo et al., 2024). Students' ability to recognise

teacher motivation also supports evidence that the affective climate of the classroom is shaped significantly by teachers' emotional and motivational states (Tambak et al., 2025; Pedler, Yeigh, & Hudson, 2020).

Institutionally, the study identifies several barriers to creativity: limited digital resources, insufficient training, and concerns about parental acceptance of modern methods. These constraints mirror challenges faced by educators in many madrasa contexts across Southeast Asia (Yasin et al., 2025). The tension between tradition and modern innovation remains a central issue; some teachers fear that novel pedagogical practices may be perceived as undermining religious conservatism. This reflects broader debates on reforming Islamic education, suggesting that transformation must balance pedagogical innovation with respect for religious norms (Tambak, & Sukenti, 2020; Harpeni Dewantara, 2020).

Taken together, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of how teacher motivation and performance interact to shape teaching creativity in Islamic religious contexts. It provides empirical evidence that creativity is not an isolated trait but a dynamic competence requiring supportive institutional ecosystems, continuous professional development, and motivational reinforcement. The findings call for teacher training programs focused on creative pedagogy, technology integration, and reflective practice, as well as policy reforms that incorporate creativity into teacher evaluation standards. Strengthening organizational culture—through leadership that empowers risk-taking, provides recognition, and supports professional growth—is essential for sustaining creative instructional practices.

Overall, this study reinforces the argument that enhancing creativity in IRE is essential for preparing students to engage with Islamic teachings intellectually, emotionally, and ethically in contemporary contexts. By fostering teacher motivation, strengthening performance, and building institutional support, madrasas can cultivate learning environments that are spiritually grounded, intellectually stimulating, and pedagogically innovative.

6. Conclusion

The present study provides a nuanced understanding of how teaching creativity among madrasa *tsanawiyya* teachers is shaped by the interplay between teacher performance, motivational engagement, and institutional conditions. The findings reveal that teachers who possess strong intrinsic motivation—particularly motivations rooted in spiritual responsibility and professional commitment—demonstrate higher levels of creativity in designing and implementing instructional strategies for Islamic Religious Education. Creativity, in turn, enhances their pedagogical performance by enabling clearer explanation of complex Islamic concepts, improving student engagement, and fostering deeper religious and moral understanding. However, the study also highlights significant challenges faced by madrasa *tsanawiyya* teachers, including administrative burdens, limited access to digital resources, insufficient pedagogical training, and concerns regarding the compatibility of innovative methods with traditional expectations. These barriers restrict teachers' capacity to sustain creative practices despite their strong personal motivation. Institutional support—through leadership encouragement, adequate training, and resource provision—emerges as a decisive factor enabling teachers to translate motivation into meaningful instructional innovation. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that teaching experience alone does not guarantee creativity; rather, creativity is most effectively cultivated when combined with school support systems and sustained motivational engagement. Experienced teachers are often more confident and innovative, yet novice teachers can also develop strong creative capacities when provided with appropriate guidance and professional development opportunities. Overall, this research underscores the importance of strengthening motivational climates, enhancing teacher performance, and cultivating institutional ecosystems that support creative pedagogy. Such efforts are vital for improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education and ensuring that madrasas prepare students who are intellectually capable, spiritually grounded, and well-equipped to navigate contemporary societal challenges.

Author Contribution Statement

Disclosure of Interests

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