

Creativity of Moral Faith Teachers in Developing Educational Games to Increase Student Learning Activity

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Abstract

This study is motivated by the importance of teacher creativity in creating engaging learning processes that can enhance students' learning activity, particularly in Aqidah Akhlak subjects, which are often perceived as monotonous. This study aims to describe the forms of creativity exhibited by an Aqidah Akhlak teacher in developing educational games based on the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) model to enhance student learning activity at MTs Al-Munawarrah, Jambi City. A descriptive qualitative approach with a field research design was employed. The research subjects were Aqidah Akhlak teachers, with supporting informants including the school principal, other teachers, and students. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Findings reveal that the teacher developed educational games by modifying conventional games and activities, thereby successfully increasing the activity levels of most students. These findings are significant as a basis for professional development policies for madrasah teachers that go beyond providing physical facilities to building a psychological and cultural ecosystem that sustainably nurtures teacher creativity.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh pentingnya kreativitas guru dalam menciptakan pembelajaran yang menarik dan mampu meningkatkan keaktifan siswa, khususnya pada mata pelajaran Aqidah Akhlak yang sering dianggap monoton. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan bentuk kreativitas guru aqidah akhlak dalam mengembangkan permainan edukatif berbasis model Teams Games Tournament (TGT) untuk meningkatkan keaktifan belajar siswa di MTs Al-Munawarrah Kota Jambi. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan jenis penelitian lapangan. Subjek penelitian adalah guru Aqidah Akhlak, dengan informan pendukung kepala madrasah, guru lain, dan siswa. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman, yaitu reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa guru mengembangkan permainan edukatif hasil modifikasi permainan konvensional yang terbukti meningkatkan keaktifan mayoritas siswa. Hasil penelitian ini penting sebagai landasan kebijakan pengembangan profesional guru madrasah yang tidak sekadar menyediakan fasilitas, tetapi juga membangun ekosistem psikologis dan kultural yang menopang kreativitas guru secara berkelanjutan.

Keywords:

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic religious education has a fundamental role in shaping students who have faith, piety, and noble character. One of the subjects that contributes directly to the formation of this character is Akidah Akhlak (Annisa & Jumari, 2024; Aziz et al., 2025; Mulia, 2020; Pambayun et al., 2025; D. Sari, 2025; G. W. W. Sari & Nazib, 2022). Existing studies converge on the premise that Akidah Akhlak learning meaningfully shapes students' character and religious behavior, yet they differ in how they establish this and at what level of schooling (Permadi et al., 2025; Tanjung et al., 2023). A quantitative correlational study found a very strong statistical relationship between Akidah Akhlak learning and senior high school students' religious behavior (Assidiq & Zakiyah, 2021). By contrast, a qualitative study at the madrasah ibtidaiyah level examined how character integration unfolds through curriculum-aligned lesson planning (Aulia et al., 2026; Mulia, 2020; Munawaroh, 2025; Wiswanti & Belaga, 2020). Another study described this integration as a planning-implementation-evaluation cycle, which was found to be hampered by weak teacher-parent synchronization (Mulia, 2020; D. Sari, 2025; G. W. W. Sari & Nazib, 2022). At the junior secondary level, implementation was found to combine classroom instruction, formal evaluation, and supervised habituation, shaped by environmental support and obstacles such as the gap between community and school norms (Alqosam et al., 2022; Assidiq & Zakiyah, 2021; Sufiani, 2017). Resource limitations, negative social influences, and differing family backgrounds were also identified as recurring challenges, alongside the argument that consistent implementation paired with school-parent collaboration is what ultimately makes the subject effective (Mulia, 2020; D. Sari, 2025; G. W. W. Sari & Nazib, 2022). Together, these studies point to a shared conclusion: the effectiveness of Akidah Akhlak learning is never automatic, but contingent on how it is planned and delivered, which raises the question of how classroom delivery itself, and specifically the methods teachers choose to engage students, shapes that effectiveness.

Initial data obtained through field observation at MTs Al-Munawarrah, Jambi City shows an interesting reality as well as indicating gaps that need to be studied in depth. The teachers of moral beliefs in the madrasah have independently and actively developed educational games by modifying conventional games that are familiar to students such as snakes and ladders into learning tools that are in harmony with the curricular goals of the Moral Beliefs subject (Adiansah et al., 2026; Cahyani et al., 2026; Irfani et al., 2025; Mujiharto et al., 2025). In addition to modifying existing games, teachers also designed a number of games independently, such as pokemon tracks and fruit cards that were tailored to the characteristics of the material and students' learning needs. The results of these preliminary observations show that most students appear active during the game-based learning process, although a small percentage of students still show passive tendencies. These preliminary findings indicate the great potential of teachers' creativity in increasing learning activity, but at the same time emphasizing the need for a more in-depth study to understand how the teacher's creative process takes place, what factors support it, and what obstacles hinder its optimal implementation. This gap is the starting point of this research, because field data confirms the existence of real teacher creativity practices that have not been documented and systematically studied in an adequate scientific framework (Andrianto et al., 2021; Anwar & Jasiah, 2025).

Previous research in the past decade has shown an increase in the use of media in Islamic education, but it leaves a void in the depth of the teacher's creative process. Research (Alawiyah et al., 2023) specifically examined the application of TGT in

increasing student learning activity in PAI learning and found a significant increase in active participation while the research (Zahro, 2024) confirmed that 94.4% of students felt that TGT helped them understand the material of Akidah Akhlak better, and 83.3% stated that learning became more interesting. Recent studies are increasingly diverse, with research exploring the effectiveness of TGT with the help of various digital media in the context of Islamic subjects (Ishak & Kamalludin, 2024; Mahardi et al., 2019). However, all existing research consistently places teachers as implementers of the TGT model, not as active creators of educational games whose creative process is used as a separate object of study. No research was found that specifically examined the creativity of moral faith teachers in developing and modifying TGT-based educational games in the MTs environment, including the supporting factors and obstacles in the field.

The creativity of PAI teachers in designing and choosing learning models is a determining factor in the creation of an effective and meaningful learning situation (Anwar & Jasiah, 2025; Tahawali & Aimang, 2021). This creativity requires careful documentation and analysis so that it can be used as a reference model for the development of teacher professionalism more broadly. Based on the exposure of these gaps and arguments, this study aims to see and recognize the forms of creativity of Akidah Akhlak teachers in developing educational games to increase student learning activity. The benefits of this research provide a real contribution in the form of a descriptive model of teacher creativity that can be a guide for PAI teachers in other madrasas in developing educational games that are contextual, innovative, and have a real impact on increasing student learning activity (Alawiyah et al., 2023)

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive type of field research. This type was chosen because the purpose of the research is to describe, explore, and understand in depth the phenomenon of creativity of moral faith teachers in developing educational games as the phenomenon occurs naturally in the field, without manipulating variables or engineering research conditions. The research was carried out at MTs Al-Munawarrah, Jambi City, Jambi Province, starting from the date of 19 January to 12 April. The selection of the location was based on the findings of initial observations that showed the practice of significant pedagogical creativity of the moral faith teachers in the madrasah, so that it is suitable as a representative research setting in the context of game-based learning in the private tsanawiyah madrasah environment.

The determination of the research subject uses the purposive sampling technique by setting the criteria for informants who have direct involvement and a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied, the main informant in this study is the teacher of the subject of Moral Faith who actively designs and implements educational games in the classroom. To ensure data balance, the researcher also pulled data from supporting informants, consisting of the principal (to see the school's policy support for learning innovation), other teacher colleagues (to see the collaborative impact and peer perception), as well as some grade VIII students.

Data collection is carried out through three mutually reinforcing techniques. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all research subjects using interview guidelines that had been developed beforehand. The informants consisted of one Akidah Akhlak teacher, one additional teacher, the vice principal of the madrasah, and five students, selected through purposive sampling. Interviews were conducted in

a semi-structured manner to explore information about teachers' creative processes, motivations, and challenges in designing and implementing educational games, as well as students' experiences of learning through these games. The interviews were recorded with the informants' consent and then transcribed verbatim. Second, participatory-passive observation was carried out directly in the classroom during the Akidah Akhlak learning process. A total of five classroom observations were conducted in grade VIII, with each observation covering one full regular Akidah Akhlak class session. Researchers were present during learning activities without being directly involved, focusing on the process of implementing educational games, teacher-student interaction, and the overall learning atmosphere. Third, documentation, which is used as supporting data in the form of learning tools, photos of activities, and other related documents (Waruwu, 2023).

The collected data was analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model which consisted of three stages that ran simultaneously and repeatedly. The first stage is data reduction, where all the raw data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation is sorted, focused, and simplified. Interview transcripts are thematically coded to identify recurring patterns and categories relevant to the focus of the research, namely forms of teacher creativity, supporting factors, and implementation barriers. The second stage is data presentation, where the reduced data is compiled into the form of descriptive narratives, matrices, and thematic tables that facilitate the process of drawing conclusions. The third stage is conclusion drawing and verification, which is carried out gradually as the data is collected, not after all the data is collected, thus allowing researchers to immediately verify the initial findings with subsequent data until the saturation point is reached (Murdiyanto, 2020).

The validity of the data in this study is guaranteed through two triangulation strategies. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing information obtained from moral faith teachers, school principals, other teachers, and students to verify the consistency and credibility of the data. If there is a difference in perspective among informants, these differences are actually used as separate analysis material that enriches the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Triangulation techniques are carried out by comparing data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation for the same information, so that if the three techniques produce information that confirms each other, then the credibility of the findings can be stated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study are presented to provide a comprehensive understanding of the creativity of moral faith teachers in developing educational games to increase student learning activity. These findings were obtained from an in-depth analysis of observational data, interview transcripts, and supporting documentation collected during the study period. Each section is presented with a detailed narrative explanation supported by empirical evidence from the field. The presentation of the findings emphasizes both the complexity of the phenomenon and the interconnectedness between its various dimensions. Through this structured approach, the results of the research aim to provide a holistic and analytical picture of the creativity of moral faith teachers. Based on the data collection and analysis process that has been carried out, the results of the research are obtained which are described in the following sub-sections.

Forms of Teacher Creativity in the Development of Educational Games

The results of the study show that the Akidah Akhlak teacher at MTs Al-Munawarrah Jambi City has developed several types of educational games which are the result of modifications from conventional games. Based on the results of the interviews, the use of educational games was motivated by the teacher's desire to direct the energy of students who were previously active outside the learning context into an activity that supports the learning process. The teacher stated that:

"First, to increase student activity, many of our students are active, but active outside the context of learning, for example, talking, joking, and so on, now I channel that energy with learning activities through games, it turns out that the use of games is very effective compared to just watching, viewing videos or whatever, it turns out that it is not so effective. Well, coupled with more effective games. Then the second is so that my child is motivated to learn, then the third is that they like to compete with each other to get points to be active."

Each game is designed with the relevance of the material, the student's cognitive level, and the learning objectives to be achieved. The following is a description of each educational game developed.

Table 1.

Summary of Educational Games Developed by Moral Faith Teachers

Games	Description
Educational Snake Ladder	Modification of the conventional snake and ladder with the addition of questions of Akidah Akhlak material to each box, played in groups to encourage discussion and collaboration.
Jejak Pokemon	Students are divided into 5 groups and each member of the group answers the teacher's questions to get points and move forward
Fruit Cards	Fruit picture cards that are modified into question cards and answers to Akidah Akhlak material; played in pairs or small groups to practice understanding of concepts.

Each of these three games targets a distinct combination of learning dimensions rather than serving a single, uniform function. Educational Snake Ladder is structured around group play, placing its primary emphasis on the affective and social dimensions of learning activity, discussion, negotiation, and peer collaboration, while the embedded questions sustain cognitive engagement with the material. Jejak Pokemon, by contrast, isolates individual accountability within a group structure: because each member must answer to advance, it foregrounds cognitive recall under time pressure while still preserving a collective, turn-based dynamic. Fruit Cards operates at a smaller social scale (pairs or small groups), which appears better suited to students who are less comfortable performing in front of the whole class, combining conceptual recall (cognitive) with the physical act of matching cards (psychomotor). Read together, the three games suggest that the teacher's creativity lies not only in adapting content to a game format, but in deliberately varying the social scale and pacing of each game to reach students with different levels of confidence and different learning preferences, a pattern that becomes clearer in the subsequent discussion of student learning activity.

The Process of Planning and Development of Educational Games by Teachers

The results of the study revealed that the development of educational games by teachers of Akidah Akhlak at MTs Al-Munawwarrah was not carried out spontaneously, but through a systematic planning process. Based on the results of in-depth interviews with teachers, there are several stages that are passed in the game development process, namely: identification of materials that are suitable for the game approach; selection of the type of game relevant to the characteristics of the student; modification of game rules and content according to learning objectives; trial of the game before it is applied in the classroom; and evaluation and refinement based on student responses, the teacher stated:

"First, you have to know first what learning goals you want to achieve and the most effective approach for children, sometimes there are some children who have difficulty with the discussion system, so we make individual games, so it is adjusted again to the goals and also the learning style, then it is seen from this the final evaluation results. Before studying, we hold a post-test first. Judging by the post-test results, the score results turned out to be lacking, learning continued, games took place, and later it was seen again in the pre-test. It was found out whether it was effective or not. If there is an increase in value, it means that it is effective. But if for example in terms of value there is no increase, it means that it is less effective. If it is less effective, it means it will be changed. Let's find out what the problem is. Is it because of the concept of his learning style, or maybe the material is not paid enough attention."

The teacher explained that modifications were more made on the material aspect than the form of the game. The same game can be used in different school years by adjusting the content of the questions based on the material being studied, the teacher states:

"Modifying the material, because in the last few years there have been slight changes, like in grade 8, last year there was material about the story of the prophet what it is, the same this year I learned the material of other prophets, so this time it was a modification of the material"

The teacher said in an interview that not all Akidah Akhlak material is suitable to be packaged in the form of games. Materials that are memorized and conceptual understanding are considered more suitable to be packaged in educational games, while materials that are reflective and value appreciation are more appropriate using other approaches. This shows that teachers' creativity is not only about creating games, but also pedagogical skills in choosing and aligning learning strategies with the characteristics of the material and the needs of students.

In the creative process, teachers are inspired by various sources, especially digital platforms such as YouTube and Instagram that display creative learning content from other teachers, as in the following interview

"I am inspired by YouTube or Instagram, look at some friends at our school, media is only one if for example relying on infocus, there must be many teachers who use it difficult, so that's how to find other solutions that can make children active but with this simple media, force themselves to be creative"

Teachers also make modifications to existing games by adjusting the content of the material. For example, in the material on the story of the prophet in grade VIII which changes every year, the teacher modifies the playing cards with different material on the story of the prophet according to the applicable curriculum. Thus, the games used are not completely newly created, but modified from conventional games that are familiar to students.

Table 2. *Stages of Educational Game Development*

Stages	Teacher Activities
Analysis	Identify learning objectives and student characteristics
Planning	Determining the appropriate type of game
Development	Modify material into a game
Implementation	Applying games in TGT learning
Evaluation	Assessing the effectiveness of games through student learning outcomes

Based on the table, it can be understood that game development is carried out systematically and oriented towards learning objectives. Teachers do not just use games as entertainment, but as a means to achieve predetermined learning competencies. Notably, this five-stage process is not merely administrative; it corresponds to a measurable feedback loop, as reflected in the teacher's own account of comparing pre-test and post-test results to judge a game's effectiveness. This suggests that teacher creativity in this context operates cyclically rather than linearly: the Evaluation stage routinely feeds back into Analysis, prompting teachers to revisit either the game format or the instructional approach when learning outcomes fall short. The recurring modification of Jejak Pokemon and Fruit Cards to match yearly changes in curriculum content, described earlier, is a direct expression of this cycle in practice indicating that teacher creativity here functions as an ongoing, self-correcting process rather than a one-time act of invention.

Student Learning Activity in Educational Game-Based Learning

Based on the results of observations during the learning process, it was found that the application of educational games in general succeeded in increasing student learning activity in the classroom. The majority of students showed active participation characterized by enthusiasm in participating in the game, courage to ask questions, actively answering questions, and engaging in group discussions. However, the researcher also noted that there is still a small percentage of students who tend to be passive, especially students who have an introverted character or who are not used to active learning approaches.

*Table 3.**Indicators of Student Learning Activity in Educational Games*

Activity Indicators	Findings in the Field
Courage to ask	Most students actively ask questions during the game, especially when encountering difficult questions.
Participation in groups	The majority of students are actively involved in group discussions; The cooperation between group members is clearly seen in the game of snakes and ladders.
Speed of responding to material	The Tik Tak Boom game encourages students to respond quickly; Almost all students actively participated.
Enthusiasm for following the game	The level of enthusiasm is high at all types of games, characterized by the facial expressions and enthusiasm of the students as seen from the documentation.
Students who are still passive	There are still a small number of students ($\pm 15-20\%$) who tend to be passive, especially when it is their turn to speak or when playing fruit cards.

These five indicators, taken together, show that game-based learning does not raise student activity uniformly across all dimensions. Enthusiasm and group participation – largely affective and social indicators – appear to be the most consistently and strongly activated, present across nearly every game observed. Speed of responding, a more cognitive indicator, is likewise activated but is game-specific, tied closely to fast-paced formats such as Tik Tak Boom rather than being a general effect of gamification itself. Courage to ask, however, sits at the intersection of the cognitive and affective dimensions: it requires students to have understood the material well enough to formulate a question, but also enough confidence to voice it – and it is precisely at this intersection that the persistent 15–20% of passive students is concentrated, as reflected in the game of fruit cards and in students' own accounts of understanding the material but feeling too embarrassed to speak in front of peers. This suggests that the games are highly effective at activating affective engagement and cognitive processing individually, but less effective at bridging the two for students whose barrier to participation is social confidence rather than comprehension – a distinction with direct implications for how teachers might further differentiate game formats going forward.

The results of interviews with students revealed that they felt more enthusiastic and did not feel bored when learning using games. Students also stated that games help them more easily understand and remember the material of Akidah Akhlak, such as the following interview:

"Learning with games is very fun, because it becomes more active, exciting, especially using points, so it is more challenged, exciting and active. I prefer to learn to use games than others, even though playing can still add insight, the material becomes easier to understand."

Meanwhile, students who are still passive generally state that they actually listen and understand the material, but still feel less confident to perform and speak in front of their peers, as stated below:

"Learning by playing is fun but if you are told to talk in front of your friends, you are embarrassed, especially the system who is fast, sometimes you already know the answer but are embarrassed to say it"

DISCUSSION

This section of the discussion critically analyzes research findings by linking them to relevant theories and previous research results. The findings of this study show that Akidah Akhlak teachers at MTs Al-Munawwarrah have high creativity in developing educational games based on conventional game modifications. This is in line with the concept of creativity put forward by Munandar (2012), who states that creativity is the ability to combine existing elements into something new and meaningful (Badawi, 2023; Rekan et al., 2025; Widianita et al., 2023). In this context, teachers do not create games from scratch, but modify games that students are familiar with such as snakes and ladders so that they have a pedagogical function that is in line with the learning goals of the Moral Faith. Picasouw et al. (2023) emphasized that teachers' creativity in designing innovative learning media has been shown to increase intrinsic motivation and active student participation, which is also in line with the findings in this study (Yusdiana et al., 2026; Zakariyah & Muttaqin, 2025).

These findings are reinforced by Istiq'faroh et al. (2024) who conclude that educational games that are tailored to the age and context of students are able to create a more meaningful and effective learning experience. Furthermore, the modification of

conventional games also reflects the sensitivity of teachers to the limitations of madrasah facilities, where the games developed do not require advanced technology but are still able to provide interactive and fun learning.

The data-based evaluation mechanism applied by teachers, where the results of pre-test and post-test are directly the basis for game modification decisions, represents an evidence-based teaching practice that is rarely found in the context of private madrasahs with limited resources. When post-test scores do not show improvement, teachers do not resign or blame students, but rather actively diagnose possible causes-whether it be learning style inconsistencies, weaknesses in game design, or lack of mastery of prerequisite material-before making modifications. This reflective cycle is in line with the findings (Tambak & Sukenti, 2024) that madrasah teachers who demonstrate high motivation and pedagogical competence are more likely to develop creative, contextualized, and student-centered instructional practices

The findings show that teachers' creativity is not only seen in the ability to create learning media, but also in the ability to identify the characteristics of students and change learning strategies to suit the needs of students. This is in line with the opinion of Slavin (2015) who stated that the TGT model is able to increase student participation through structured competitive activities.

Findings regarding the systematic planning process in the development of educational games show that the creativity of teachers at MTs Al-Munawarrah is not spontaneous, but based on strong pedagogical competence. Teachers are able to identify the right material to be packaged in the form of games, choose the appropriate type of game, and conduct periodic evaluations and improvements. The planning process that involves identifying the suitability of the material with the game approach also reflects the teacher's ability to distinguish the right learning strategies for each type of material.

The findings of this study also confirm that the application of educational games by Akidah Akhlak teachers has a positive impact on student learning activity at MTs Al-Munawarrah. The majority of students show active participation characterized by enthusiasm, courage to answer, and involvement in group discussions. Similar results were obtained in research on the subject of Qur'an Hadith, which found that the TGT model improves both individual and group student learning interactions, creating an active, collaborative, and enjoyable atmosphere (Devi & Neviyarni, 2025; Fauzi & Masrupah, 2024; Habil et al., 2025; Usmawati et al., 2025). This directly supports the finding that games affect not only the cognitive dimension (material understanding) but also the affective dimension (enthusiasm, confidence, motivation) (Alotaibi, 2024). Educational games are not just an entertainment tool, but an effective pedagogical instrument to improve the quality of learning Akidah Akhlak.

However, the study also found that not all students showed the same level of activity. Some students still tend to be passive during the activity. However, the number of active students is more dominant than passive students. The findings strengthen the results of research at SMPN 14 Surabaya (Fitriyah et al., 2024) who investigated efforts to increase student activity through TGT found that explicit role responsibility strategies in TGT groups significantly reduced the number of passive students, as each member felt they had a contribution that could not be replaced by others.

Based on the results of interviews with teachers and school principals, several factors were identified that support and hinder teachers' creativity in the development of educational games. The main supporting factors include full support from madrasah

management for learning innovation, teachers' high intrinsic motivation to improve learning quality, positive student responses that serve as constructive feedback for teachers, and the availability of simple, easily obtainable materials for game media. Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors include time constraints in planning and creating educational games, the fact that not all Akidah Akhlak material can be packaged as a game, the longer adaptation time some students need to adjust to a game-based active learning approach, and the need to adjust game rules whenever the material changes, which increases teachers' workload (Maarif et al., 2025; Nursyam et al., 2025). These factors warrant consideration by the madrasah in designing future teacher professional development programs.

Taken together, these findings point to a pattern that departs in an important way from how creativity is typically theorized in the education literature. Existing frameworks, including Munandar's (2012) definition of creativity as the recombination of existing elements into something new, and Picasouw et al.'s (2023) treatment of teacher creativity as a generative capacity that produces innovative learning media, implicitly assume that creativity is elective: something teachers choose to pursue in order to enrich an already-functioning learning process. The findings of this study suggest a different origin story. The teachers' own account of relying on simple, low-cost media because relying on projectors would be difficult for many teachers to sustain, together with the recurring inhibiting factors of limited time and the need to redesign game rules whenever curriculum content changes, indicates that creativity here was not elective but compelled: it emerged as a direct response to structural constraints in facilities and resources, rather than as free exploration under conditions of relative abundance.

This study terms this pattern defensive creativity, creativity that is born not from the availability of resources, but from the pressure of limited facilities, which functions as a spark for innovation rather than an obstacle to it. This reframes the relationship between constraint and innovation found in existing creativity theory: where prior frameworks treat resource limitation primarily as a barrier that creativity must overcome, the present findings suggest that in under-resourced madrasah settings, limitation itself can function as the generative mechanism that drives teachers toward inventive, non-standard pedagogical solutions. This does not contradict Munandar's (2012) definition of creativity as the recombination of existing elements into something new, but it adds an important qualifier: in this context, what gets recombined is shaped less by teachers' free selection among available materials than by which materials remain accessible after resource constraints have narrowed the field of options. Defensive creativity, in this sense, is a specific and previously undertheorized subtype of teacher creativity that may be especially relevant to under-resourced Islamic educational institutions elsewhere in Indonesia, and one that future research could examine comparatively against creativity practices in better-resourced schools to test whether the same pressure-driven mechanism holds.

The findings of this study have significant relevance for the development of Islamic education in Indonesia, especially at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level. In the midst of the challenges of the digital era that requires teachers to continue to innovate, the creativity of Akidah Akhlak teachers at MTs Al-Munawwarrah in modifying conventional games into educational games is a good practice (*best practice*) that deserve to be replicated and further developed. This is in line with the policy direction of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes the importance of student-centered, active, creative, and fun learning. Nuriyani et al. (2023) emphasizing that the

implementation of innovative learning strategies that are able to encourage students' activeness and creativity in learning is a necessity in realizing quality education in the contemporary era.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the creativity of Akidah Akhlak teachers in designing educational games at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Swasta Al-Munawwarrah, Jambi City has been carried out well through the development of varied and innovative learning media. However, this creativity does not grow from a supportive ecosystem, but is born from limitations. Field findings show that teachers developed educational games not because the madrasah provided an ideal creativity ecosystem, but because the limitation of infocus availability motivated them to seek alternatives, the pattern discussed above as defensive creativity.

The contribution of this research moves across three layers. In the first layer, this study confirms previous findings that the TGT model based on educational games consistently increases student learning activity in the subject of Akidah Akhlak. In the second layer, this study challenges the prevalent assumption in the literature on the creativity of PAI teachers that the availability of institutional support is automatically correlated with the development of teacher creativity in the field. In the third and most original layer, and as substantiated in the discussion above, this research contributes the concept of defensive creativity-creativity that is born not from resource abundance, but from the pressure of limited facilities, which functions as a spark for innovation rather than an obstacle to it.

This research has a number of limitations that need to be honestly acknowledged. The study was limited to one location, one subject, and one level of education, so the findings cannot be directly generalized to a broader context. The qualitative approach used, although descriptively rich, does not allow for a measurable quantitative assessment of the increase in student activity. These limitations open up an urgent agenda for further research, including multi-location comparative studies to test the cross-context validity of the defensive creativity concept, and mixed-methods research to measure the impact of educational games more comprehensively.

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