

The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Fostering Student Learning Creativity

Darwati¹, Ismail², Usman Alwi³

¹⁻³ Pascasarjana Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Agama Al-Furqan Makassar

daribrah@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in fostering students' learning creativity at SMKN 2 Pangkep. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The analysis involved data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing to obtain valid and comprehensive findings. The results show that PAI teachers play several essential roles in the learning process, including those of *murabbi* (educator and nurturer of character), *mu'allim* (provider of knowledge), *mu'addib* (moral guide), *mudarris* (classroom teacher), *mursyid* (spiritual mentor), and *ustadz* (religious role model). To realize these roles, teachers apply various creative learning strategies such as interactive discussions, project-based and contextual learning, simulations, motivation sessions, and the use of digital media. These methods help create a learning environment that is active, engaging, and conducive to creativity. The study also finds that students demonstrate several forms of creativity, including confidence in expressing opinions, critical and analytical thinking, collaboration, the ability to produce Islamic-based works, and active involvement in religious and social activities. Such outcomes show that creativity in Islamic education is holistic, encompassing intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions. Overall, this study highlights the crucial role of PAI teachers in developing students who are not only religiously observant but also creative, innovative, and adaptable to modern educational challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is one of the important components in the national education system which has a strategic role in shaping the character, morals, and spirituality of students (Karadona & Sari, 2025). PAI not only functions as a means of transferring religious knowledge, but also as an instrument for the formation of a complete personality that is balanced between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Rohani et al., 2025). In the context of national education, PAI is expected to produce a generation of faith, piety, and noble character, as stated in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which emphasizes that education aims to develop the potential of students to become human beings who believe and fear God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and to be a democratic and responsible citizen.

However, in practice, PAI learning in schools is often still running traditionally (Ismail et al., 2025). Lecture, memorization, and written assignment methods still dominate the classroom, while students become passive recipients of the knowledge conveyed by the teacher. This condition causes the learning process to be less able to foster students' curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking skills (Hartina et al., 2025). As a result, PAI lessons are often seen as normative, theoretical, and far from the reality of everyday life. In fact, the essence of religious education is to instill Islamic values contextually so that students are able to integrate religious teachings with the challenges and changes of the times. Creativity in the world of education has a very deep meaning defining creativity as a

person's ability to produce useful new ideas, ideas, or works, both in concrete and abstract form (Sitepu, 2019). In the context of learning, learning creativity includes the ability of learners to think originally, solve problems in innovative ways, and produce valuable work. Creativity-oriented education will encourage students to actively seek knowledge, not just receive information from teachers. Therefore, learning that encourages creativity is an urgent need in facing the challenges of the 21st century marked by rapid changes in the field of science and technology.

From an Islamic perspective, creativity is not at odds with religious values, in fact highly recommended. Islam glorifies science and places humans as creatures who have the potential to think, innovate, and create. This can be seen in QS. Al-'Alaq verses 1–5 which affirm the command to read (*iqra'*) as a symbol of the development of human knowledge and creativity (Ashari et al., 2025). According to the Quraish Shihab's commentary, *the command of iqra'* is not only the command to read written texts, but an invitation to study, research, and understand various phenomena of life using the potential of reason endowed by Allah SWT (Setyawan, 2023). Thus, PAI learning should not stop at mastering religious dogma, but also foster the spirit of exploration, innovation, and the search for the meaning of life according to Islamic teachings.

In the tradition of classical Islamic education, teachers have a very noble and complex role. (Yudistira et al., 2025) explained that in the Islamic view, teachers not only function as *mu'allim* (givers of knowledge), but also as *murabbi* (educators and character builders), *mu'addib* (cultivators of manners and morals), and *mursyid* (spiritual guides). These roles show that the teacher's job is not limited to imparting knowledge, but to guide students to have a balanced intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and moral intelligence. Therefore, PAI teachers in the modern era must be able to combine religious values with the ability to think creatively in accordance with the times. The challenges of Islamic religious education in the era of globalization are increasingly complex. The development of information technology, digital media, and the flow of value globalization require teachers to be more adaptive to changes in learning paradigms. It is not enough for PAI teachers to only master religious materials, but also to be able to utilize digital technology as an interesting and interactive means of learning. In this case, Maimunah & Jannah, (2025) emphasizing the importance of four competencies in the 21st century, namely *critical thinking*, *communication*, *collaboration*, and *creativity*. PAI teachers are expected to be able to apply learning that fosters critical, collaborative, and creative thinking skills while still being based on Islamic values.

Phenomena in the field show that in vocational schools such as SMKN 2 Pangkep, PAI teachers face various challenges. Most students are more oriented towards learning vocational skills, so religious lessons are often considered complementary or non-productive subjects. Many students are still passive, lack the courage to express their opinions, and have difficulty associating Islamic values with the context of their profession and life. On the other hand, some PAI teachers are still stuck in conventional approaches that have not taken advantage of the potential of technology and creativity in the teaching and learning process. In fact, religious education in vocational schools has great potential to form a generation that is not only technically skilled, but also religious and innovative in character.

For this reason, PAI teachers are needed who have strong pedagogical, professional, social, and personality competencies (Arqam et al., 2026). Creative PAI teachers are able to transform learning from just a transfer of knowledge into a living, dynamic, and meaningful process. Through creative approaches such as *project-based learning*, interactive discussions, value simulation, problem-based learning, and the use of digital media, teachers can create a fun and challenging learning atmosphere for students (Ali et al., 2024). In this way, students are encouraged to think reflectively, participate actively, and be able to express religious ideas and values in the form of real

works (Karadona et al., 2022). In addition, PAI teachers need to understand that creativity in religious learning does not only mean the ability to produce artistic works, but also includes divergent thinking skills and the ability to solve problems with an Islamic perspective. For example, when students are invited to discuss social issues such as poverty, the environment, or work ethics, teachers can guide them to find creative solutions based on the values of justice, responsibility, and compassion that Islam teaches. Thus, religious learning becomes a means of character formation that is relevant to social reality.

Learning creativity also has a close relationship with motivation and the learning environment. Inspirational PAI teachers are able to build a positive learning atmosphere, where students feel valued, listened to, and given space to express themselves (Rahmawati et al., 2025). The local context at SMKN 2 Pangkep is also an important aspect of this study. As a work-oriented vocational school, learners are faced with the challenge of blending technical skills with moral and spiritual values. The role of PAI teachers here is very strategic to ensure that students are not only competently prepared, but also have strong, creative, and responsible characters. PAI teachers are expected to be able to instill an understanding that Islamic values are not an obstacle to innovation, but a source of inspiration to create and work with noble ethics.

Based on this description, it can be understood that the role of PAI teachers in fostering students' learning creativity is a very important aspect in the development of Islamic education in the modern era. Through a creative, contextual, and Islamic values-based learning approach, PAI teachers can help students develop critical thinking potential, adaptability, and balanced spiritual intelligence. Thus, religious education is no longer seen as a purely normative lesson, but as a forum for character development, values, and innovation in accordance with the spirit of the times. Therefore, this study is focused on describing in depth the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in fostering student learning creativity at SMKN 2 Pangkep. This research also aims to describe the learning strategies applied by teachers, the obstacles faced in the learning process, and the forms of creativity that develop among students as a result of this learning. The results of this research are expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution in an effort to improve the quality of PAI learning that is adaptive to the development of the times, as well as strengthen the role of teachers as agents of shaping a creative, religious, and noble generation.

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of PAI teachers in fostering learning creativity at SMKN 2 Pangkep. The location was chosen because of the context of the vocational school relevant to the research objectives, and the main focus was PAI teachers as the core informants, accompanied by principals and students as supporting data sources. The selection of informants is carried out purposively (based on consideration of their ability to explain the phenomenon), so that the data obtained is representative of the learning practices to be studied. Data was collected through in-depth interviews (to explore perceptions and experiences), classroom observations (to see student interaction and activity), and documentation such as lesson plans and student work (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019). Data analysis follows Miles and Huberman's interactive model including data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions with an iterative process to find consistent patterns. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and methods, confirmation of provisional results to informants (member checking), as well as discussions and inputs from supervisors or peers (Miles & Huberman, 2020). The following research methods were used:

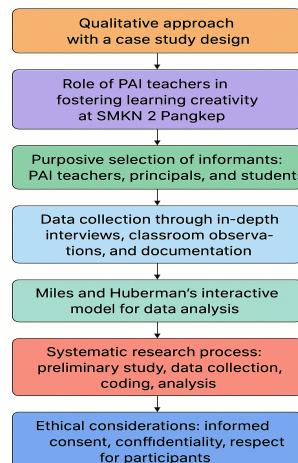


Figure 1. Research Methods

In addition, the research process also involved several systematic stages to ensure the depth and credibility of the findings. The researcher began by conducting a preliminary study to identify the context of PAI learning and the characteristics of teachers at SMKN 2 Pangkep. This was followed by the preparation of interview guidelines and observation sheets based on the research focus. During the data collection phase, the researcher maintained reflective field notes to record situational nuances and nonverbal responses that complemented verbal data. Data coding was carried out manually by grouping themes that emerged from the interview transcripts, observations, and documents. The findings were then analyzed through cross-case comparisons between different informants to strengthen interpretation and minimize bias. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' time and privacy, were also carefully upheld throughout the research process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Role of PAI Teachers in Fostering Student Learning Creativity

Based on the results of research conducted at SMKN 2 Pangkep, it is known that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers have a very central role in fostering student learning creativity. PAI teachers not only function as deliverers of religious materials, but also as moral guides, spiritual motivators, and inspirers in creating an active and fun learning atmosphere. The role of the teacher can be categorized into six dimensions as stated by Abuddin Nata, namely as murabbi, mu'allim, mu'addib, mudarris, mursyid, and ustaz. Each of these roles complements each other and contributes to the development of students' character, spirituality, and creativity.

a. Teacher as Murabbi (Educator and Personality Coach)

The term *murabbi* comes from the word *tarbiyah* which means education which includes the process of coaching, nurturing, and developing the personality of students as a whole. In the context of Islamic education, the role of a *murabbi* requires teachers to not only teach knowledge, but also instill moral and spiritual values. At SMKN 2 Pangkep, PAI teachers show this role by giving loving attention to students, instilling the values of honesty, responsibility, and discipline in daily life.

PAI teachers foster students' character through example. For example, teachers always arrive on time, be polite to all school residents, and gently reprimand students when students behave impolitely. This example creates a humane and inspiring educational climate. Teachers also develop positive habits, such as praying together before studying, sharing religious experiences, and *self-reflection* activities to improve behavior. Thus, teachers as *murabbi* play a role in shaping the personality of students who have faith, noble character, and have a high spirit of learning.

b. Teacher as Mu'allim (Teacher and Transfer of Knowledge)

As *mu'allim*, teachers play a role in imparting knowledge and providing enlightenment to students. However, in practice at SMKN 2 Pangkep, PAI teachers not only play the role of conveying religious knowledge textually, but also as facilitators who foster students' reasoning and creativity. Teachers use a variety of active learning methods such as group discussions, *project-based learning*, and case studies that connect Islamic values with modern social realities and technologies.

For example, students are invited to make da'wah videos, Islamic posters, and digital moral campaigns related to fiqh, moral, and aqidah lessons. This activity not only deepens religious understanding, but also hone the ability to think critically, collaboratively, and creatively. One of the students revealed that religious lessons now feel more fun and meaningful because teachers often associate it with real life. Thus, the role of the *mu'allim* here also means that teachers become a bridge between religious knowledge and the challenges of modern life.

c. Teacher as Mu'addib (Former of Manners and Morals)

In the perspective of classical Islam, *mu'addib* is an educator who focuses on the formation of *adab*, which is a combination of morals, ethics, and spirituality that is manifested in daily behavior. PAI teachers at SMKN 2 Pangkep play an important role in instilling manners in students. This process is carried out not only through formal teaching, but also through example and habituation. Teachers instill an attitude of respect for teachers and parents, get used to good speech, and maintain cleanliness and order in the classroom. Students are encouraged to apply adab before knowledge, in accordance with the principles of previous scholars such as Imam Malik and Imam al-Ghazali. In addition, PAI teachers teach the values of empathy, social concern, and moral responsibility towards the school environment. These values help students develop a balanced personality between intellectual and emotional intelligence.

d. Teacher as Mudarris (Instructor and Provider of Structured Material)

As *mudarris*, PAI teachers play a role in delivering lessons systematically and structured based on the applicable curriculum. At SMKN 2 Pangkep, teachers prepare learning tools such as lesson plans, digital modules, and interactive learning media. The use of learning technology is an important part of teachers' strategies, such as the use of *PowerPoint*, Islamic learning videos, digital quizzes through Google Forms, and other educational applications that attract students' attention. This role shows that PAI teachers are also adaptive to educational technology developments. By integrating digital media, teachers help students understand religious material in a more contextual and engaging way. Teachers also provide constructive feedback on student work, both in the form of written assignments, projects, and digital works. This encourages students to continue to innovate and dare to try new things in learning.

e. Teacher as Mursyid (Spiritual and Emotional Guide)

The role of the *mursyid* emphasizes the spiritual and emotional dimensions of the teacher's duties. Teachers as *mursyid* function to guide students towards inner peace and sincerity in worship. At SMKN 2 Pangkep, PAI teachers are not only teachers in the classroom, but also spiritual counselors for students. Teachers guide students who are experiencing personal problems, such as loss of motivation, conflicts with friends, or family problems, with a calming religious approach. This role makes PAI teachers a figure who is trusted and respected by students, because their presence brings calm and solutions based on Islamic values. Spiritual approaches such as *meditation*, collective prayer, and personal guidance help students develop emotional and mental balance in the face of life's challenges.

f. Teachers as Ustadz (Role Models and Sources of Scientific and Moral Examples)

In the context of Islamic education, *ustadz* means an authoritative exemplary figure, both scientifically and morally. Teachers as *ustadz* not only master religious knowledge, but also display exemplary behavior by students. At SMKN 2 Pangkep, PAI teachers play the role of role models who instill the spirit of da'wah, sincerity, and social responsibility. Teachers encourage students to be active in school religious activities such as Qur'an tadarus, social services, commemoration of Islamic holidays, and Islamic work competitions. Through this activity, students learn to apply Islamic values in real life in people's lives. Teachers are also inspirers in developing creativity based on Islamic values, such as creating digital da'wah content, religious writings, and socio-religious activities.

Thus, the role of *ustadz* is the peak of integration between knowledge, faith, and charity in the educational process. Teachers do not only educate through words, but also through real examples that are imprinted in students. These six roles illustrate that PAI teachers at SMKN 2 Pangkep are not only transmitters of religious knowledge, but also agents of *change* who foster a culture of critical, creative, and religious thinking in schools. Through a humanist, spiritual, and innovative approach, PAI teachers succeed in integrating Islamic values with the development of modern educational technology, resulting in students who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also excel in moral, social, and spiritual.

3.2. PAI Teachers' Strategies in Fostering Learning Creativity

This study found that PAI teachers at SMKN 2 Pangkep applied four main strategy indicators that were consistent with findings in the field: (a) the use of varied methods, (b) the provision of motivation and student involvement, (c) the use of learning media, and (d) the creation of a conducive learning atmosphere. These four indicators complement each other and are directed to increase students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor involvement so that learning creativity can grow optimally in the PAI classroom.

The use of varied methods is the teacher's effort to apply various methods, techniques, and approaches in the learning process so that it is not monotonous, and adjusts to the characteristics and needs of students (Fakhira et al., n.d.). Varied methods allow students to learn through hands-on experience, discussions, projects, and simulations, so they can develop creative thinking potential and problem-solving skills (Ayunda et al., 2024). PAI teachers consciously avoid monotonous learning patterns by combining various methods such as group discussions, case studies, project-based learning, simulations, and creative presentations.

The goal is for students to develop creative thinking potential through active and contextual learning activities. For example, in moral material, teachers ask students to create da'wah posters and reflective video projects that integrate fiqh and moral materials, which are then presented in front of the class. This variety of methods not only enriches students' learning experiences but also enhances their divergent and collaborative thinking skills, as Sanjaya emphasized that varied learning methods are able to foster students' active participation and creativity.

Providing student motivation and involvement is a strategy to foster the spirit of learning through emotional support, rewards, and active student involvement in every stage of learning. Motivation is not only external (teacher encouragement), but also internal, that is, it arises from the student's awareness to learn because of the perceived value and meaning. Teachers strive to foster a spirit of learning by providing rewards, positive reinforcement, and spiritual advice. Motivation is also provided through the cultivation of religious values such as patience, responsibility, and sincerity in seeking knowledge. In addition, teachers provide opportunities for students to participate directly in the learning process, such as being discussion moderators, prayer leaders, or group spokespersons. In this way, students feel valued and have a sense of responsibility for their learning outcomes.

Asmani emphasized that teacher motivation has a significant effect on students' activeness and creativity in PAI learning because it involves spiritual and emotional aspects at the same time.

The use of learning media is the use of various tools or means of communication to convey learning messages to make them more interesting, interactive, and easy for students to understand. Learning media functions to clarify material, stimulate interest in learning, and provide opportunities for students to express their creativity through visual and digital forms (Magdalena et al., 2021). Teachers use various media, both conventional and digital, as a means of enriching the learning experience. The media used includes PowerPoint slides, educational videos, design applications such as Canva, to online learning platforms such as Google Classroom. The media helps students understand abstract concepts in PAI visually and interestingly. Teachers also provide space for students to use digital media in conveying ideas, such as making da'wah posters, designing hadith infographics, or Islamic vlogs. Thus, learning media functions as a means of developing creativity as well as improving students' digital literacy. Hosnan emphasized that the use of interactive media is the key to 21st century learning because it supports students' creativity and collaboration.

A conducive learning atmosphere is a condition of a learning environment that is comfortable, safe, and supports freedom of expression without pressure or fear. A conducive environment includes physical aspects (spatial planning and facilities), social (relationships between students), and psychological (sense of security and acceptance) (Syarwani & Rahman, 2025). A good atmosphere allows students to dare to express their opinions, innovate, and learn from mistakes. Teachers strive to create a classroom environment that is comfortable, safe, and respectful of dissent. A positive learning environment allows students to express themselves freely without fear of being wrong or embarrassed. Teachers also organize classrooms to support group work and healthy social interaction. At the beginning of the lesson, teachers often start with a short recitation or reflection on Islamic values to build a peaceful spiritual atmosphere.

Thus, students not only learn cognitively but also experience affective experiences that foster empathy and togetherness. Mulyasa stated that a conducive learning climate is the foundation for the emergence of students' creative ideas, because a calm and supportive atmosphere fosters confidence and independent thinking. These four strategies show that PAI teachers at SMKN 2 Pangkep have implemented a holistic and adaptive learning approach. The use of diverse methods fosters students' curiosity, continuous motivation strengthens learning commitment, the use of media increases visual and digital creativity, and a conducive learning atmosphere creates space for innovation. The combination of these four makes PAI learning not only focus on knowledge transfer, but also on developing students' character and creativity in a balanced manner.

3.3. Forms of Student Learning Creativity as a Result of the Role of PAI Teachers

Student learning creativity is the result of the implementation of PAI teachers' learning strategies that are oriented towards developing students' individual and social potential. Conceptually, learning creativity can be interpreted as the ability of students to generate new ideas, express ideas originally, and solve problems in an innovative way and in accordance with Islamic values. Based on the results of research at SMKN 2 Pangkep, five main forms of learning creativity were found that developed in students, namely: critical thinking, courage to express opinions, cooperation in groups, the ability to produce Islamic works, and active participation in religious and social activities.

Critical thinking is the ability to analyze, evaluate, and interpret information in depth in order to produce a rational and objective understanding (Manurung et al., 2023). In the context of PAI learning, critical thinking means examining Islamic values logically and contextually to make them relevant to modern life. Students of SMKN 2 Pangkep show the ability to analyze religious and social issues logically and provide arguments that are relevant to Islamic values. In class discussion

activities, students are able to distinguish between personal opinions and postulates sourced from the Qur'an and hadith. This shows that their thought process is not only memorized, but has led to reflection and reasoning. Teachers consider that this critical thinking ability is an important indicator of learning creativity because it encourages students to relate religious teachings to the reality of daily life.

The courage to express an opinion is the confident attitude of students to express ideas, ideas, or responses to a problem without fear of being wrong or judged. In the context of Islamic education, this attitude is part of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*, inviting kindness in a wise way (Mulyana et al., 2025). In the learning process, students seem to be actively asking questions, expressing opinions, and responding to classmates' ideas. PAI teachers provide space for every student to speak and express their views, even if those opinions differ from the majority. In this way, teachers build a culture of dialogue that values freedom of thought within the corridor of Islamic values. According to Sudrajat, the courage to speak up is a characteristic of creative students because it shows confidence and the ability to think independently.

Cooperation is the ability of students to interact and collaborate with classmates in achieving common goals. In PAI learning, cooperation is an effective medium to instill the values of Islamic ukhuwah, mutual respect, and mutual cooperation. In project-based learning, students are trained to work collaboratively to complete tasks that require synergy of ideas, role sharing, and effective communication. Through group activities such as making da'wah videos or Islamic moral campaigns, students learn to respect differences of ideas and support each other to achieve common goals. This collaborative principle strengthens students' social competence and empathy, as Lie explained that cooperation is the foundation for the growth of group creativity.

Islamic works are the creation of students that contain Islamic values both in verbal, visual, and digital forms. This work reflects the integration between students' intellectual and spiritual creativity, as well as being a means of da'wah in the school environment. Students of SMKN 2 Pangkep are able to express religious values in the form of creative works, such as da'wah poster designs, Islamic motivational videos, and educational content on school social media. This activity not only hone students' visual and digital creativity, but also strengthens the internalization of Islamic teachings through real practice. PAI teachers direct that each work contains a moral message that is in accordance with the subject matter, for example about honesty, responsibility, or compassion for fellow humans.

Active participation is the voluntary involvement of students in religious and social activities aimed at fostering empathy, care, and social responsibility. In Islamic education, social participation is a form of practicing the values of faith and piety which is manifested through righteous deeds. The creativity of students is also reflected in their activeness in participating in religious activities such as tadarus al-Qur'an, congregational prayers, commemoration of Islamic holidays, and social service. Through these activities, students learn to implement spiritual and social values directly. According to Nata, active involvement in religious activities is a form of integration between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in religious learning. The results of this study explain about:

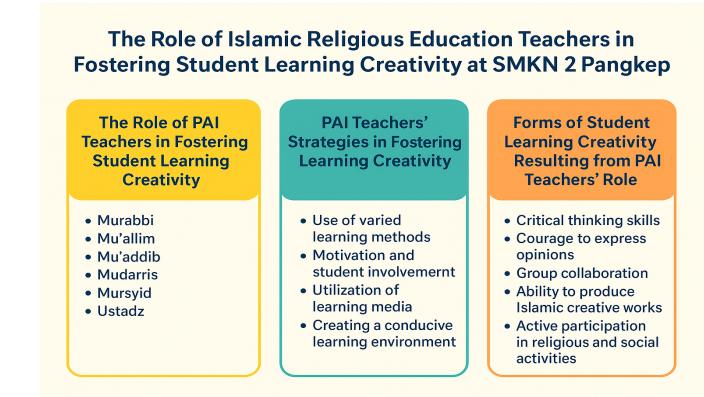


Figure 2. Results and Discussion

Thus, the results of this study show that creative PAI learning has a significant effect on changes in student learning behavior. Creativity does not only appear in academic contexts, but also in social and spiritual life. The learning initiated by PAI teachers at SMKN 2 Pangkep has succeeded in building a religious, innovative, and participatory learning culture.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research on The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Fostering Student Learning Creativity at SMKN 2 Pangkep, it can be concluded that PAI teachers have a very strategic role in developing students' creative potential, both from intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects. PAI teachers not only function as transmitters of religious knowledge, but also as *murabbi*, *mu'allim*, *mu'addib*, *mudarris*, *mursyid*, and *ustadz* who guide students as a whole towards the formation of Islamic character and creative thinking skills. In carrying out their roles, PAI teachers apply various varied, contextual, and innovative learning strategies, such as interactive discussions, *project-based learning*, the use of digital media, and the creation of a conducive and inspiring learning atmosphere. This approach has proven to be effective in increasing students' motivation to learn, activeness, and their ability to think critically, dare to speak their minds, work together, and produce Islamic works that are relevant to real life. The results of the study show that students' learning creativity grows through collaboration between Islamic values and modern learning methods. Such creativity is not only reflected in intellectual abilities, but also in moral and spiritual dimensions, such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and a spirit of innovation.

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