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Optimizing 21st-Century Skills through Marketplace Activity and Grouping Variations in Islamic Religious Education

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Abstract

Islamic Religious Education learning is still often teacher-centered, limiting students' active participation and the development of 21st-century skills. This study aims to analyze how the Marketplace Activity (MPA) model and variations in grouping strategies foster the four Cs (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity) in Islamic Religious Education classrooms. Using a qualitative case study design at a public senior high school in Sidoarjo, data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings show that MPA promotes dynamic and meaningful learning interactions. Heterogeneous groups encourage diverse ideas, dialogic exchange, and critical reflection, while homogeneous groups support task efficiency and clarity of roles. The four Cs emerged as Islamic value-based learning outcomes: value-driven collaborative communication, spiritual-intellectual collaboration, reflective faith-based reasoning, and integrative Islamic creativity. This study concludes that MPA has strong potential as an integrative learning model that connects cognitive skill development with spiritual character formation, making Islamic Religious Education more relevant to the competence and morality demands of the 21st century. Practically, teachers are encouraged to design student-centered activities, apply flexible grouping structures aligned with learning objectives, and integrate faith-based values with higher-order thinking to strengthen both academic and spiritual outcomes.

Keywords 21st-Century Skills; Islamic Religious Education; Marketplace Activity

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of science and technology in the 21st century demands a transformation in the education system, particularly in facilitating students' acquisition of essential skills, including critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity, collectively referred to as the 4C skills (Muliana, Nufus, & Fonna, 2024). These four skills are integral to the profile of 21st-century learners who can compete globally, adapt to change, and play an active role in building society (Shalehah, 2023). To

achieve this, a learning design is needed that is not only oriented towards cognitive achievement but also empowers the affective and psychomotor potential of learners.

However, in practice, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at the secondary school level is still dominated by a conventional approach that is textual, rote learning, and teacher-centered (Audi, Hamami, Gonibala, & Bonde, 2024). The main focus is still on normative and cognitive understanding of teaching materials, so that the space for students to develop critical thinking skills, teamwork skills, and the ability to convey ideas effectively is very limited (Akbar et al., 2023). This imbalance raises a strategic problem, namely the lack of integration of adaptive learning models to the demands of the 21st century in the context of PAI learning.

The primary issue that can be identified is the limited application of learning approaches that foster the development of 21st-century skills in PAI subjects. Based on preliminary interviews with two PAI teachers at a public high school in Sidoarjo Regency, PAI learning still tends to be conventional and teacher-centered. Learning activities focus more on theoretical explanations and individual assignments, so students are not accustomed to honing their critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity skills. In fact, Islamic values are highly relevant to character development, cooperation, and collective problem-solving. One potential approach to address this condition is the Marketplace Activity (MPA) model, which allows students to be actively involved in simulating information exchange, like in a market (Asmuni, 2018). In line with this, research at SDN 3 Mawasangka found a significant increase in average scores and completion rates in the subject of Living Openly by Sharing after the implementation of KKL (Irawan & Otaya, 2022). A study at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Hikmah Aceh Tamiang by (W & Ismail, 2023) Also showed an improvement in the quality of PAI learning through MPA. Thus, the MPA model has the potential to be an innovative learning strategy for PAI that aligns with strengthening 21st-century competencies.

In addition to the learning approach, grouping strategies (such as varying group sizes) also have a significant influence on the dynamics of interaction among students. Research (Andika, 2013) Shows that the form of grouping plays a role in determining the quality of interaction, where homogeneous groups tend to display symmetrical interactions. In contrast, heterogeneous groups produce asymmetrical interactions with a wider range of views. Grouping that does not consider the diversity of abilities, learning styles, and backgrounds of students tends to result in a monotonous and unproductive learning atmosphere.

This is evident in a study (Hidayah, Ishari, & Ibermarza, 2023), which found that homogeneous grouping actually reduces male students' motivation to learn because female students dominate the classroom dynamics. In comparison, an international study by An & Zhang (2024) in Thinking Skills and Creativity reveals that heterogeneous groups foster more active social communication and richer collaboration than homogeneous groups, despite homogeneous groups having advantages in teamwork efficiency. Thus, grouping variations that take into account gender balance and ability can be important factors in creating adaptive and motivating learning interactions.

Conversely, planned grouping, whether heterogeneous or homogeneous, can optimize the collaborative process, increase participation, and facilitate peer learning. In the context of PBL (Zaein, Wijoyo, & Hariyanti, 2025) Proved that heterogeneous groups enrich important discussions, while homogeneous groups accelerate work efficiency in completing tasks. In the context of the Marketplace Activity model, grouping strategies are a key factor in shaping a learning ecosystem that maximizes 21st-century skills. This is in line with the findings of (Saugi, 2018) This shows that ability-based grouping increases activity by up to 78% and learning outcomes by 75%, highlighting the importance of grouping strategies in supporting active learning models.

The integrative application of the Marketplace Activity model and its various groupings presents a strategic opportunity to transform PAI learning into a more contextual, participatory, and enjoyable experience. Research (Asmuni, 2018) Supports this idea by demonstrating that MPA encourages the

active participation of high school students in PAI learning. This approach enables students not only to understand Islamic values theoretically but also to internalize them through activities relevant to real life. Unfortunately, the application of this combination of models in the context of PAI learning is still rarely found, both in classroom learning practices and in scientific studies.

Previous studies have discussed the effectiveness of the Marketplace Activity model in PAI learning. Research by (Hasnan Ahmad Habiballah & Bahrodin, 2025) This model demonstrates that it successfully enhances students' understanding of fiqh material at MTsN 15 Jombang. Similarly, a relevant review comes from (Lasimpala, 2023), which explores the integration of the TPACK-based Marketplace Activity method in PAI learning, particularly in the subject matter of Hajj and Umrah. This study noted a significant increase in students' cognitive achievements, marked by an increase in average scores and a higher rate of classical mastery that exceeded the minimum mastery threshold. However, the focus of these studies remains concentrated on academic performance. It does not explicitly link the application of this model to the 21st-century skills framework, particularly in the dimensions of collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking skills. This gap encourages the need for more comprehensive and transformative studies.

The strategy of grouping students as part of instructional design has also not been studied in depth in relation to the effectiveness of active learning in the context of religious studies. Most studies view grouping as a technical factor, rather than a planned pedagogical strategy, to support student collaboration and participation. This indicates a gap in the literature that has not comprehensively examined the integration of grouping strategies and social simulation-based learning models in PAI.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how the Marketplace Activity (MPA) model, combined with variations in grouping (homogeneous and heterogeneous), fosters students' 4C skills: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity in PAI learning. Specifically, it addresses two research questions: (1) How does MPA facilitate the development of the 4Cs in PAI classrooms? and (2) How do homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping strategies shape student interaction to support the 4Cs? Overall, the findings suggest that MPA fosters dynamic and reflective learning interactions. Heterogeneous grouping promotes diverse ideas and critical reflection, while homogeneous grouping enhances efficiency and task clarity, ultimately leading to Islamic value-based manifestations of the 4Cs.

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a field case study (Lexi J. Moleong, 2002). The focus of the study is on the implementation process of the Marketplace Activity (MPA) model and variations in student grouping in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning, as well as its contribution to the development of 21st-century skills, including communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. The main focus includes: (1) the application of MPA as an instructional strategy, (2) variations in student grouping (heterogeneous and homogeneous) based on learning styles and activity levels, and (3) forms of 4C skill reinforcement that emerge during learning.

The research was conducted at SMAN 3 Sidoarjo, a state senior high school with an 'A' accreditation, characterized by a competitive academic culture and a heterogeneous learning environment in terms of both social and religious aspects. The majority of students came from urban environments with good digital literacy and above-average academic achievement. The research subjects consisted of two 10th-grade classes, comprising a total of 70 students who were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in implementing the learning model, the diversity of their academic and social characteristics, and their willingness to participate in the entire series of activities.

The fieldwork was conducted over two weeks in April 2025, as the case was tied to the implementation of the Marketplace Activity (MPA) in two intact Grade 10 classes within a specific

instructional unit and schedule. Within this period, the researcher observed the complete MPA cycle across the planned meetings and captured repeated interaction patterns during group work and marketplace exchanges. The limited duration was compensated by intensive classroom observation, semi-structured interviews conducted immediately after the implementation, and documentation analysis, with credibility strengthened through triangulation and member checking.

The main research instruments were participatory observation sheets, semi-structured interview guidelines, and documentation. The interview guidelines were prepared by identifying research themes (learning models, group dynamics, and 4C skills) and then adjusted to align with 21st-century competency indicators. Examples of observation indicators include the ability to convey ideas, provide feedback, contribute to group task completion, generate creative ideas, and reflect Islamic values in the interaction process. Instrument validation was carried out through expert judgment by one Islamic education lecturer and one learning technology lecturer, followed by a pilot observation to ensure the clarity of the indicators.

Data analysis techniques were employed through a thematic analysis, which involved data reduction, data presentation, and concluding. Data reduction was carried out by sorting relevant information from observation notes, interview transcripts, and learning documentation. The reduced data was then organized thematically based on the research focus, such as model effectiveness, student responses, implementation challenges, and skill achievement. Conclusions were drawn based on patterns of findings that emerged consistently across the data. To ensure data validity, the researcher used triangulation techniques, namely comparing the results of various data collection techniques and information sources, as well as confirming with research subjects through member checking techniques (Sugiyono, 2020).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

The implementation of the Marketplace Activity (MPA) model in Islamic Religious Education classes X-E 10 and X-E 11 at SMAN 3 Sidoarjo yielded several empirical findings related to classroom dynamics, student participation, grouping strategies, and the development of 21st-century skills. Religious education, which is usually theoretical in nature, was transformed into an active, enjoyable, and meaningful learning experience.

This study reveals that the application of the Marketplace Activity (MPA) model in Islamic Religious Education enhances the creation of a more interactive, collaborative, and reflective learning atmosphere. Student learning activities increased significantly, especially in terms of courage to speak, participation in discussions, and group work. Heterogeneous grouping strategies encouraged diversity of ideas and peer learning, while homogeneous groups increased the efficiency of task completion. In addition, students showed positive perceptions of MPA because it provided space for expression, increased confidence, and fostered creativity in delivering religious material.

Learning Activities and Student Participation

Learning with the Marketplace Activity model requires students to participate in various roles actively. Observations indicate that, in the first meeting, students were still adjusting to the new pattern. Some students actively dominated the discussion and information delivery, while others chose to take on the role of note-taker or material supporter. However, this dynamic began to change in the second meeting. Students seemed more accustomed to the marketplace mechanism, so the division of roles became more equitable. Students who were initially passive began to show the courage to speak up and ask questions. The classroom atmosphere became more dynamic, enthusiasm increased, and interactions between groups ran more smoothly.

These findings show that MPA can encourage active student involvement in the learning process. This is in line with Vygotsky's view, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through social interaction (Muhammad, Darmayanti, Sugianto, & Choirudin, 2023). The process of "buying and selling" knowledge in MPA provides a collaborative space that allows students to act as both learners and teachers. This concept is also in line with the active learning theory, which states that students' direct involvement in learning activities increases their understanding and retention of knowledge (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

In the context of PAI, this dynamic is significant. Until now, PAI has been understood as a lecture-oriented subject. The findings of this study suggest that adopting a more participatory learning model will enhance students' motivation and confidence in expressing themselves.

Table 1. Student learning activities

Activity Indicator	Session 1	Session 2	Key Findings
Participation in Discussions	The majority of students actively compiled materials and asked questions.	Discussions are faster and more focused.	Participation increased compared to lecture methods.
Courage to Speak Up	Students who were usually passive began to speak up.	More students become spokespersons.	Confidence increased.
Group Cooperation	Initially, certain students dominated the discussion.	Role distribution is fairer and more efficient.	Collaboration became more balanced.
Enthusiasm for Learning	The classroom atmosphere was dynamic, with students enthusiastically changing groups.	The atmosphere is relaxed yet focused.	Enthusiasm was maintained throughout the activity.

(Source: Class Observation Results, 2025)

Observations during the two meetings showed an increase in student activity. In the first meeting, the majority of students actively compiled materials and asked questions, although some students still dominated the group. In the second meeting, the discussion proceeded more quickly and was more focused, the division of roles became more equitable, and group collaboration became more balanced. The courage to speak up also increased, with more students daring to be spokespersons. Enthusiasm for learning was maintained throughout the activity, characterized by a dynamic yet focused classroom atmosphere.

Grouping Strategy and Discussion Dynamics

The student grouping strategy proved to have a significant impact on the learning dynamics. In the first meeting, the researchers used heterogeneous grouping, combining students with varying levels of academic ability, learning styles, and activity levels. Observations revealed that high-ability students often acted as spokespersons or peer tutors, while students with medium or low abilities remained engaged through writing, note-taking, and organizing materials. Discussions became richer as different perspectives generated diverse ideas.

These findings support the theory of cooperative learning, which emphasizes that diversity in groups can foster peer learning and develop social skills (Johnson & Roger, 2021). Research (Zaein et al., 2025) It was also found that heterogeneous groups encourage cross-ability interactions, enrich arguments, and foster tolerance. In contrast, in the second meeting, a homogeneous grouping strategy was used. Homogeneous groups demonstrated high efficiency in material preparation because their thought processes were relatively similar. They completed tasks more quickly, but the ideas they generated tended to be limited in scope and depth.

Table 2. Comparison of the results of the two clustering strategies

Types of Grouping	Observation Results	Key Findings
Heterogeneous (mixed abilities)	Discussions were richer, students learned from one another's differences, and there was an initial dominance.	Fosters tolerance and cross-character collaboration.
Homogeneous (similar abilities/learning styles)	Material preparation was faster, and discussions tended to be narrow.	Highly efficient, but less critical and diverse.

(Source: Class Observation Results, 2025)

Both strategies have advantages and disadvantages. This is in line with the view (Muhammad Yusuf, Andi Marauleng, Islamiah Syam, Siti Masita, & Marsuanti Marzuki, 2024) The effectiveness of grouping depends heavily on the learning objectives. If the primary objective is to strengthen conceptual understanding through diverse ideas, then heterogeneous grouping is more suitable. However, if the priority is task completion efficiency, then homogeneous grouping can be chosen.

Student Perceptions of Marketplace Activity

The implementation of Marketplace Activity (MPA) in Islamic Religious Education learning has been proven to provide a more meaningful learning experience for students. This is in line with (Mukhid, 2023), which emphasizes that technological design and innovation in educational culture can provide a learning experience that is both relevant and interesting. In this context, interviews with students revealed their experiences during MPA. Some students admitted to feeling more relaxed when speaking, more confident, and encouraged to think creatively when conveying information. Some students also highlighted the differences in learning experiences between heterogeneous and homogeneous groups, noting that each had its own advantages and disadvantages.

The following is a summary of the findings from the interviews, mapped into a table:

Table 3. Quotes and Findings from Student Interviews Regarding Marketplace Activity

Student Code	Key Statements	Findings
Student A	"I am usually afraid when asked to come forward, but at the marketplace I was able to talk to other groups."	Psychological barriers to speaking are reduced.
Student B	"If we mix, we can help our friends, and if we work together, it is faster because we are on the same page."	Both grouping strategies have their own advantages.
Student C	"We think of ways to make others understand, not just talk."	Students' creativity in conveying information increases.
Student D	"I am usually shy when asked to speak, but during this activity, it was like a normal conversation."	Self-confidence grows in a relaxed atmosphere.

(Source: Student Interviews, 2025)

This statement from students emphasizes the importance of giving space to student voices. When students are actively involved in speaking and sharing ideas, their confidence increases (Syafi'i, 2022). Although some students feel awkward at first, they eventually adapt with the guidance of their teachers. This aligns with the findings (Pohan, 2025), Which Suggest That Learning innovations often cause initial confusion but ultimately enrich the learning experience of students.

Discussion

Marketplace Activity (MPA) has proven to be an active learning space that not only emphasizes conceptual understanding but also fosters the four key 21st-century skills (Four Cs): communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. The process of "buying and selling knowledge" in MPA places students as active subjects of learning, both as sellers and buyers of ideas. This dynamic is further enriched when combined with a variety of grouping strategies (heterogeneous and homogeneous), which produce different and complementary patterns of 4C development.

Table 4 below illustrates the characteristics of differences in the development of 21st-century skills (4Cs) based on variations in grouping strategies in the context of Marketplace Activity. This table shows that heterogeneous groups tend to produce more reflective and creative interaction dynamics, while homogeneous groups excel in terms of efficiency and cognitive focus.

Table 4. Differences in 4C Skill Development Based on Grouping Variations in the Context of Marketplace Activity

Skills	Heterogeneous grouping	Homogeneous Grouping
Communication	Diverse communication styles, peer tutors, and reflective interaction.	Fast, efficient communication, but lacking variety.
Collaboration	Dynamic, fostering empathy and cross-ability cooperation.	Solid, efficient collaboration, but minimal exploration of ideas.
Critical Thinking	In-depth analysis, clarification, and negotiation of meaning.	Fast but superficial, limited to one perspective.
Creativity	Innovative, expressive, out-of-the-box ideas.	Efficient, concise ideas, but tend to be repetitive.

(Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2025)

Communication

In the context of Marketplace Activity (MPA), communication is the foundation of meaningful learning. In heterogeneous groups, cross-ability interactions create rich and reflective communication. High-ability students can serve as peer tutors, helping to explain concepts in various ways, while other students are encouraged to express their ideas in simple yet meaningful language. Findings from An & Zhang (2024) show that heterogeneous groups produce more active, socially oriented communication, with students asking questions and sharing ideas more frequently than those in homogeneous groups. This finding aligns with Murphy et al. (2017), who found that heterogeneous group discussions enhance reasoning skills, prolong the duration of conversations, and improve the quality of questions asked by students. In this context, heterogeneity not only enriches communication perspectives but also trains students to think openly, empathetically, and critically in responding to differences in ideas.

Conversely, in homogeneous groups, communication tends to be faster and more efficient because the members' thinking rhythms are relatively similar. The speed of idea exchange increases, and the discussion process is more focused. However, the variety of communication styles and depth becomes limited. Research (Kanika, Chakraverty, Chakraborty, & Madan, 2023) Reveals that homogeneous groups do provide a sense of comfort and stability in interactions, but they are less stimulating for reflective questions or debates. Similar results were also found by (Fauzi, Usman, Hayati, & Nasihudin, 2023) As homogeneity increases, group work efficiency also increases, but it reduces the dynamics of dialogue. Thus, homogeneous groups excel in communication efficiency, while heterogeneous groups excel in the quality and depth of interaction.

This study reinforces the view (Beronilla & Natividad, 2025) That heterogeneity in learning is not

only a pedagogical strategy but also a form of social justice and inclusivity in the classroom. Communication that grows from diversity fosters social awareness, mutual respect for differences, and erodes exclusive tendencies among students. These findings provide an important reflection that, in the context of Islamic Religious Education, communication skills should not only be measured by fluency in speaking, but also by the extent to which students can engage in empathetic dialogue, respect different views, and convey Islamic values in polite communication practices.

The practical implications of these results suggest that Islamic Education teachers should consciously design discussion activities that require students to speak, listen, and respond to their peers' arguments politely, in accordance with Islamic communication etiquette. Teachers can use value-based communication rubrics (polite, argumentative, respectful of opinions, and providing meaningful feedback). Schools also need to provide collaborative religious communication training sessions, such as interactive micro-teaching, polite debates on Islamic values, and peer mentoring, so that communication skills can grow in line with the formation of character.

Collaboration

Marketplace Activity (MPA) offers students the opportunity to take an active role in the learning process. In heterogeneous groups, collaboration develops dynamically through cross-ability interactions. Students with a high level of understanding help explain the material to friends who need it, while other students contribute through creative ideas and new perspectives (Maksić & Jošić, 2021). This dynamic gives rise to a form of cooperation that is not merely about sharing tasks, but sharing meaning and shared responsibility. These findings align with those of Van Dijk, Eysink, & De Jong (2020). Click or tap here to enter text. This suggests that heterogeneous groups facilitate richer cooperative dialogue through the repeated negotiation of ideas and the clarification of concepts. Such discussions strengthen emotional engagement between students and foster social trust within the learning group.

In addition to expanding academic interaction, heterogeneous groups also foster social awareness and empathy. Research (Ningsih, Suseno, & Salim, 2023) In the local context, this is supported: students in diverse groups tend to support each other and use more positive sentences when discussing. This phenomenon shows that good collaboration is not only determined by similarity in abilities, but by students' ability to understand and appreciate the differences among group members. Conversely, in homogeneous groups, cooperation is more efficient because the learning rhythms are similar and there are few differences of opinion. However, (Kurniati, 2025) Warns that homogeneity, although efficient, can reduce the quality of mutual learning due to a lack of intellectual challenges and social emotions in the interaction process.

From an international perspective, a study by (Gillies, 2016) A study in The International Journal of Educational Research confirms that the most effective collaboration arises from constructive diversity. In this situation, the diversity of ideas is processed productively through open interaction. Market Place Activity, with its “buy and sell ideas” format, naturally creates this kind of atmosphere. The process of bargaining ideas among students encourages them to defend their opinions with rational arguments, listen to other perspectives, and agree on joint solutions (AlAfnan, Dishari, & Siti Fatimah MohdZuki, 2024). In other words, heterogeneity acts as a catalyst that accelerates students' social and thinking maturity.

The practical implication of this finding is the need to develop group work rules that ensure role sharing, deliberation, and self-evaluation based on Islamic values of brotherhood and solidarity. Teachers can implement role rotation (discussion leader, note-taker, interpreter of arguments, summarizer) so that collaboration is not only technical but also fosters spiritual responsibility and togetherness. Schools can also integrate service-learning projects based on religious values, ensuring that collaboration extends beyond the classroom and has a lasting impact on students' social lives.

Critical Thinking

Marketplace Activity (MPA) encourages students not only to receive information but also to test, evaluate, and defend arguments actively. This process is essential for the development of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). In MPA practice, the "buying and selling of ideas" format forces each student to give reasons, respond to counterarguments, and select evidence that supports their position. This mechanism triggers analytical and evaluative processes, enabling students to construct reasons, compare evidence, and revise their opinions through critical dialogue.

Empirically, heterogeneous groups in MPA exhibit a higher frequency and quality of high-level questions, as students ask for clarification, request evidence, and challenge assumptions about activities that contribute to a deeper understanding of the material. Quantitative research on ability grouping indicates that heterogeneity tends to be beneficial for high-level comprehension, as it encourages the exchange of arguments and extends the duration of discussions that stimulate critical thinking (Murphy et al., 2017).

From a theoretical perspective, structured cooperative dialogue catalyzes critical thinking. Studies on dialogue and collective reasoning confirm that engagement in mutually constructive conversations where students respond to, challenge, and develop ideas together facilitates the construction of higher-level knowledge. Such interactions train students to think logically, test claims, and develop reasoned arguments (Mercer & Littleton, 2007).

MPA also functions similarly to problem-based learning (PBL) or inquiry-based approaches, which have been shown to improve problem-solving skills and thinking strategies by placing students in real-world problems that require systematic analysis. With tasks designed to induce cognitive conflict, MPA forces students to seek evidence, synthesize information, and reflect on their thinking processes, a mechanism that parallels the principles of PBL described in the literature (Hmelo-Silver, 2004).

Empirical support from studies of active teaching practices at the classroom level shows that guided-inquiry and POGIL strategies are effective in improving students' critical thinking skills through structured tasks and group roles. This reinforces field findings that when MPA is combined with appropriate teacher facilitation (scaffolding, modeling, and probing questions), students' critical thinking development becomes more significant (Ilman, Putri, Sianturi, Ristanto, & Isfaeni, 2024). However, it cannot be ignored that homogeneous grouping tends to reduce epistemic challenges due to uniformity of thought patterns, so that discussions are often relatively flat and reach consensus more quickly without in-depth critical exploration. These findings are also consistent with studies showing the benefits of heterogeneity for high-quality discourse (Murphy et al., 2017).

The implications of these results emphasize that PAI teachers need to provide space for analysis that connects arguments, social realities, and student experiences so that critical thinking skills develop alongside spiritual depth. Teachers can utilize moral case-based inquiry, analysis of verses and hadiths in a modern social context, and structured religious reflection to enhance their teaching. Schools can also organize thematic Qur'anic literacy training and religious thought workshops, enabling students to become accustomed to linking logical thinking with moderate religious beliefs.

Creativity

Marketplace Activity (MPA) offers students a space to experiment and freely express new ideas within the context of Islamic Religious Education learning. In the process of "buying and selling ideas," students are not only required to understand the material but also challenged to display creative ways of conveying their understanding. In heterogeneous groups, diversity in backgrounds and abilities triggers the emergence of various strategies and approaches in explaining Islamic concepts. High-ability students tend to utilize digital media, visual illustrations, or analogical narratives to explain religious values, while other students add color with real examples from their own experiences. This combination yields lively and diverse forms of creative expression.

These findings are in line with (Wati & Purwowidodo, 2024) , which explains that diversity of ideas in collaborative groups can broaden horizons and enrich the production of new ideas. Similar results are also reinforced by (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014), who emphasize that academic creativity does not arise spontaneously, but develops when students are allowed to take intellectual risks, explore new ideas, and express themselves authentically in a supportive environment. MPA provides such an environment because its activity structure combines intellectual games with social interaction, thereby fostering the courage to try new things without fear of making mistakes.

Meanwhile, homogeneous groups exhibit different characteristics: they tend to work more efficiently and systematically, but the ideas that emerge are more limited due to similarities in mindset and experience. (Rahmawati, Sadiah, & Srigustini, 2024) Found that homogeneous groups often produce similar and less exploratory ideas, even though their execution is quick and neat. Researchers also observed this pattern: homogeneous groups focused on presenting information concisely and directly, while heterogeneous groups were more daring in experimenting with presentation formats, analogies, and varied media. Thus, it can be concluded that heterogeneity fosters the courage to innovate, while homogeneity fosters efficiency in thinking.

Beyond cognitive aspects, creativity in PAI learning also reflects the spiritual ability to interpret and apply Islamic teachings in modern life. Reflection on these findings suggests that creative thinking in PAI is not merely about generating new ideas but also discovering new meanings from Islamic values that are contextual to the times (Hasibuan, 2025). For example, when students creatively create digital da'wah simulations or analogies of Islamic economics in relation to daily activities, they are actually practicing the value of ijtihad, which is an intellectual effort to find new solutions for the common good. In other words, PAI transforms creativity into a form of scientific charity, where every new idea is born from the intention to seek truth and benefit.

This finding aligns with recent research (Beghetto, Ross, Karwowski, & Glăveanu, 2025). Hat emphasizes the importance of creative risk-taking in the learning process, where students dare to challenge old ways of thinking without losing sight of ethics and values. In the context of PAI, such creative courage must go hand in hand with wisdom (hikmah), so that the resulting innovations remain within the corridor of Islamic values. Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating this balance by providing space for idea exploration, while also instilling moral and spiritual responsibility in each student's work.

The practical implications of these findings encourage PAI teachers to create innovative spaces that combine intellectual expression, art, and religious values, for example, through the development of digital da'wah posters, short da'wah videos, or Islamic mini-product projects. The school curriculum needs to provide support in the form of time, digital design facilities, and weekly showcases to present students' work. Thus, students' creativity is not only technical, but also based on awareness of da'wah and Islamic ethics.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the application of Marketplace Activity (MPA) plays a crucial role in developing students' 21st-century skills (4Cs) in Islamic Religious Education. The findings indicate that heterogeneous groups are more effective at fostering reflective communication, social collaboration, and diverse critical thinking processes, thanks to the differences in abilities and perspectives. Meanwhile, homogeneous groups excel in work efficiency and role clarity, although the variety of ideas that emerge is more limited. These two grouping strategies complement each other in creating a rich and meaningful learning experience. Conceptually, MPA describes a learning model that combines cognitive mastery with the strengthening of spiritual values. The four aspects of 4C develop in the form of Islamic-based learning, namely valuable collaborative communication, spiritual-intellectual collaboration, reflective-faithful reasoning, and integrative Islamic creativity. Thus, this study contributes to expanding the

understanding of PAI learning practices relevant to the demands of the 21st century. MPA can be an integrative model that fosters students who are critical thinkers, collaborative, and creative in their behavior, based on Islamic values.

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