



## Integration of 21st Century Skills into Islamic Religious Education Learning Methods

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### ABSTRACT

Integration of 21st Century Skills into learning methods is crucial in modernizing Islamic Religious Education (PAI), particularly to address the challenges of learning that are relevant to the demands of the times. This study bridges the gap between traditional Islamic pedagogy and 21st-century competencies, focusing on the material of QS. Al Hujurat: 13. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with data collected through in-depth interviews with four PAI teachers from four Public Elementary Schools in Garo City, who were purposively selected based on their active involvement in teaching PAI and their experience implementing 21st-century learning strategies. Interviews were conducted during March–April 2025, recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results show that PAI teachers apply active learning methods such as group discussions, project-based learning, and the use of digital media, with the main challenges being limited learning time, lack of supporting facilities, and minimal teacher training, while existing support includes school policies and collaboration between teachers. These findings confirm that integrating 21st-century skills into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning can increase student engagement and material relevance, but requires adaptive strategies to address resource constraints. This study contributes theoretically by offering a framework for integrating 21st-century competencies into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning and practically by providing recommendations for teacher training and strengthening systemic support.

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## 1. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in elementary school education units plays an important role in building the spiritual and moral character of students. (Anwar, 2016) In the 21st century, education has experienced a paradigm shift from merely transferring knowledge to developing skills that are relevant to the demands of the times (Siregar et al., 2025). Education no longer only emphasizes cognitive aspects, but also includes non-academic skills such as communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity and innovation, known as the 4Cs (Branden Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). Knowledge itself does not just appear suddenly in the development of lessons. It is aimed at various aspects that exist in each individual both in the daily environment and in groups (Green, C. A., Kim, E. H., O'Sullivan, P. S., & Chern, 2018). With this, a desire arises to know and solve various problems that will produce knowledge. Knowledge can be acquired through theory, analysis, and application of skills (Wantu et al., 2024). The main goal of this integration is for students to not only understand religious teachings cognitively but also be able to implement these values contextually in their daily lives. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role, not only in instilling spiritual and moral values, but also in preparing students to become adaptive and competitive individuals in the era of globalization (Yuliana, 2024). One material with great potential for development in this context is Q.S. Al-Hujurat; 13, which is rich in moral and social messages such as the importance of maintaining brotherhood, respecting differences, and rejecting negative prejudice. The Merdeka Curriculum, now implemented nationally, provides room for teachers to innovate in learning methods and contextual approaches. This provides significant opportunities for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to implement project-based, collaborative, and reflective learning in accordance with the values contained in Q.S. Al-Hujurat.

The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is presented as an answer to the needs of the current education system. Circular Letter No. 1 of 2020 from the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia emphasizes the importance of learning policies that provide freedom in determining student graduation. The independent learning approach, known as Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn), opens up space for teachers and students to explore new methods in the teaching and learning process. The primary goal of this approach is to develop critical thinking skills in students. Educational success is determined by the active involvement of teachers and students, appropriate material delivery strategies, the implementation of various learning models and methods, and the availability of adequate supporting facilities. The Merdeka Belajar curriculum also provides schools with the flexibility to manage the educational process based on available resources and referring to the desired educational vision and goals (Waliyul Maulana iregar, Septian Prawijaya, Fandi Setiawan, 2023)

To realize this educational paradigm, the role of teachers as the primary foundation for improving educational quality must not be overlooked (Ahmad Fahrudin, 2025). It is time for teachers to be given the freedom and space to manage learning in innovative, independent, yet educational ways, so that the learning process becomes more effective, engaging, and enjoyable. The teaching profession is not an ordinary job, but a crucial one, playing a significant role in determining the direction and future of the nation. Therefore, teachers must possess strong personalities, be role models for students, and design and implement learning with sincerity and dedication. Meanwhile, students also need to shift their perspective; school is not merely an obligation, but a necessity. They

are not merely passive recipients, but active participants in the learning process, possessing the potential and strength to realize their dreams and believing that "I can do it." (Nalurita, 2020)

However, in reality, children's critical thinking skills during Islamic Religious Education remain low (Ichsan, I., Suharyat, Y., Santosa, T. A., & Satria, 2023). It is often acknowledged that children find it difficult to identify and draw appropriate conclusions when studying Islamic Religious Education (Fauziyah, A. S., & Badrussalam, 2023). Furthermore, according to the findings of the 2018 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Indonesian children achieved a score of 396 out of 500 in critical thinking skills, which is below the global average score for children (Hariyadi, S., Santosa, T. A., & Sakti, 2023). Furthermore, there is a lack of implementation among educators in integrating paradigms into the Islamic Religious Education learning process that foster critical thinking in children (Ahmad, I. F., & Syafii, 2020).

Other problems include traditional curricula that have not been integrated with 21st-century skills, monotonous and minimally participatory teaching methods, and limited access to information technology (Al., 2024). Many students are limited to memorizing and reading material presented by teachers, without applying it to their daily lives. This leads to low critical thinking skills and minimal initiative in problem-solving. Furthermore, some teachers have not demonstrated adequate competence, for example, in their use of technology, which is limited to displaying media without utilizing it optimally. The learning process is still dominated by a teacher-centered approach, even though 21st-century learning requires teachers to be adaptive, competent, and able to keep up with the times, which are constantly advancing technology (Nurhalimah et al., 2024). The use of innovative learning methodologies in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching at the elementary school level remains low. Many teachers still use lectures and memorization approaches that do not develop students' critical and creative thinking skills. Therefore, the integration of learning methodologies that support 21st-century skills is crucial.

Several previous studies have demonstrated the importance of a paradigm shift in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. According to Abudin Nata, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning needs to be directed at strengthening values through a contextual and reflective approach (Sari, 2023). This means that the learning process must link religious material to the realities of students' lives, while encouraging them to reflect deeply on these values so they can be internalized and implemented in their daily attitudes and behaviors. Meanwhile, another opinion emphasizes the teacher's role as a facilitator capable of creating a collaborative and communicative learning environment (M. Firman, Ika Ratih Sulistiani, 2021). In their view, teachers no longer function as the sole source of information, but rather as companions capable of creating a collaborative and communicative learning atmosphere. This type of learning environment provides space for students to exchange ideas, collaborate, and actively participate in the process of seeking and developing knowledge. With this approach, learning is expected to be more meaningful and relevant to the needs and characteristics of students.

Financial constraints and the unequal distribution of educational resources complicate efforts to implement innovative learning environments. These obstacles are exacerbated by sociocultural norms that prioritize traditional teaching and inhibit critical engagement with modern pedagogical models. The most prominent tension lies in the adoption of digital technology. While digital platforms offer avenues for expanded access

and interactivity, they also risk undermining the interpersonal dynamics and communal ethos that characterize classical Islamic learning (Malizal, 2025). This study supports this view by examining the practice of integrating 21st-Century Skills into Islamic Religious Education (IS) learning methods at elementary schools in Garo City.

This study aims to determine the learning methods used by teachers to integrate 21st-Century skills into Islamic Religious Education (IS) learning on the subject of Q.S. Al-Hujurat; 13. It also aims to identify the challenges and support schools provide in implementing 21st-Century Skills-based IS learning in four public elementary schools in Garo City, Tapung Hilir District, Kampar Regency, Riau. The focus of this study is on teachers' efforts to integrate 21st-Century skills into Islamic Religious Education (IS) learning methods on the subject of Q.S. Al-Hujurat; 13 at the elementary school level.

## **2. Method**

This type of research is field study research (Maner, 2016). description of the learning methods used by teachers in integrating 21st century skills into PAI learning material Q.S. Al-Hujurat ; 13. As well as to identify challenges and school support in implementing 21st century skills-based PAI learning. This approach Was Chosen Because it is suitable for uncovering the process, understanding, and experience of research subjects in a naturalistic manner, Without manipulation of variables.

The subjects of this study were PAI teachers from four public elementary school (SDN) in the Kota Garo area, namely UPT SD Negeri 015 Kota Garo, UPT SD Negeri 003 Kota Garo, UPT SD Negeri 024 kota Garo and UPT SD Negeri 26 Kota Garo, each representing one school, with a total of four informants. The selection of subjects was done purposively, with the consideration that the teachers werw active in teaching PAI subjects and had direct experience in implementing learning strategies in the classroom.

Data collection techniques were conductet through in-depth interviews. this interview aimed to explore information about the persepctions, Methods, and challenges faced by PAI teachers in integrating 21st century skills into the learning process. The interviews were conducted directly and recorded with the consent of the informants, and then transcribed and analyzed.

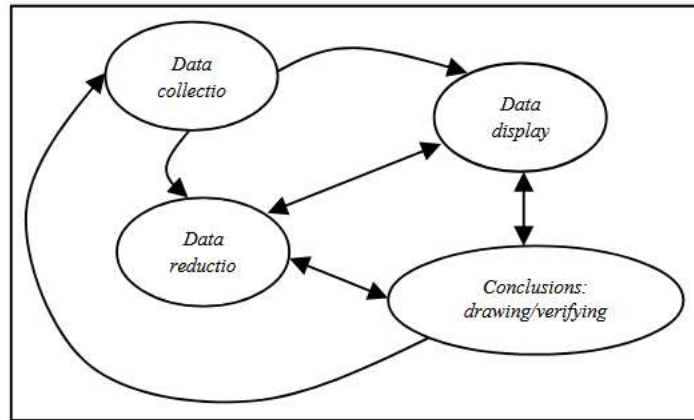
The data Obtained were analyzed using interactive qualitative analysis techniques, which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing stages. data validity wa obtained through source triangulation and increased persistence, to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings.

The interview guideline is used as a reference to ask questions to the interviewees so that the data obtained is relevant. Questons can be developed according to the interviewee's answer.

1. What learning methods do you use in PAI learning to support 21st century skills?
2. How do you encourage students to think critically and creatively in learning PAI in class?
3. How do you develop collaboration and communication skill in PAI learning?
4. What are the main obstacles you face in integrating 21st Century skill into PAI learning
5. What support has the school provided in supporting the implementation of 21st century skills-based PAI learning?

The data that has been collected is transcribed into an interview document. Each of the same data was given a code to be put together into the same theme. The themes

formed are then presented into a subtitle that contains a description of the result to be verified with the source and the final conclusion is obtained. The data analysis technique used in this research is the milles and Huberman model analysis with consists of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing / verification.(Miles, M. B., & Huberman, 2014)



Picture 1. Component technique in data analysis (interactive model)(Waliyul Maulana iregar, Septian Prawijaya, Fandi Setiawan, 2023)

### 3. Finding and Discussion

#### Finding

Based on the results of in-Depth interviews with four PAI teachers from four public elementary schools in Kota Garo, several main themes were obtained that illustrate How the integration of 21st century skills in PAI learning is implemented. The analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing in accordance with the Interactive model. The following are the findings and discussion:

#### a. Learning methods that support 21st Century skills

In an effort to integrate 21st Century skills into PAI learning, teachers at SDN Kota Garo have applied various active learning methods such as group discussions, presentations, question and answer learning, and case studies. These methods Are considered effective in encouraging students to think critically, Work Together in groups, and develop Communication and problem-solving skills. All informants stated that they have applied various active learning methods such as group discussion, presentations, question and answer Methods, and case studies. These methods are considered capable of encouraging students to think critically and work together and groups. One teachers satated that ;

"I usually use discussion, presentation and question and answer methods, so that children can exchange ideas and solve problems together." (Islamic Education Teacher at SDN 024 Kota Garo)

This is in line with the concept of 21st Century learning Which emphasizes that teachers need to create learning situations that allow students to think critically, creatively, and collaboratively. Methods such as questions and answer, discussion, and case studies are highly recommended.(Daryanto, 2017).



In the realm of Islamic education, Problem-Based Learning (PBL) provides significant opportunities to integrate Islamic values into solving real-life problems (Destriani., 2023). This approach is considered potential in realizing the vision of holistic Islamic education, which not only hones intellectual abilities but also shapes character and strengthens spirituality. The collaboration between PBL and Islamic practice has strategic value because PBL is able to effectively internalize Islamic values into a learning process oriented towards solving real-life problems. PBL acts as a link between theory and application, a crucial element in Islamic education. Thus, PBL not only conveys knowledge but also guides students to practice it meaningfully in daily religious activities (Darmawan, D., Qomaruzzaman, B., Hanan, A., & Mauliddin, 2024), thereby enriching their understanding of the application of Islamic teachings in the broader context of life (Dena Sri Anugrah, Udin Supriadi, Saepul Anwar, 2025).

thus, the application of these methods Shows the teacher's awareness in creating a learning environment that is adaptive to the Demands of the times, while equipping students with essential skills to face real life more readily and independently.

#### **b. Development of innovative critical and creative thinking in PAI learning**

The Result of interviews with several PAI teachers Showed that efforts to develop critical, creative, and innovative thinking skills have been implemented in daily learning practices. PAI teachers said that they encourage students to think critically through open-ended question and reflective activities that Islamic values to the reality of Life. For example, students are involved in discussions on issues of social Injustice, and are directed to respond to these issues based on Islamic teachings. This Shows a learning approach that fosters higher order thinking skills (HOTS), not just memorizing verses or arguments. One of the teachers stated,

“We ask students to think, for example, they see Injustice, What does Islam teach? they are asked to give their opinion”. (Islamic Education Teacher at SDN 026 Kota Garo)

The statement reflects a dialogical space in learning that stimulates students' ability to analyze and evaluate, two important components in bloom's revised taxonomy of critical thinking.

In addition to critical aspects, students' creativity is also facilitated through tasks that demand expression and development of ideas, such as making calligraphy of the Qur'an surah Al-Hujurat Verse 13, as well as creating simple learning media such as matching cards or verse and translation pair cards. This activity shows that the teacher not only encourages students to be recipients of knowledge, but also to be creators in the learning process. Teachers stated that this media emerged from the need to make learning more interesting, easy to understand, and in accordance with the characteristics of elementary school students.

“I made cards from used Cardboard, Wrote the verse on one Side and the meaning on the other. Children are so happy to learn, Because It's like playing, but still memorize the meaning of the verse”. (Islamic Education Teacher at SDN 026 Kota Garo)

Furthermore, this approach indicates teachers' innovative practices in creating learning media based on local Wisdom and affordability of resources. Pair Cards made from simple materials such as Cardboard not only strengthen students' understanding of the contents of the Qur'an, but also support kinesthetic and visual learning styles. Thus, learning becomes more fun and meaningful.

Overall, these findings show that the development of innovative critical and creative thinking in PAI learning can be done through the integration of Islamic values with Active and contextual learning Methods. This practice is in line with the paradigm of merdeka curriculum, Which emphasizes student- centered learning and strengthening character and higher-order thinking skills. The use of higher-order thinking skills in the learning process can form the habit of students to analyze, reason, and think creatively. (Putu Suardipa, 2020)

#### **c. Collaboration and Communication in PAI Learning**

In the implementation of PAI learning that discusses Q.S. Al-Hujurat ; 13 collaboration and communication skills are developed thoroughly. This verse conveys a message about the importance of diversity, the brotherhood of mankind, and the recommendation to recognize and respect differences as a form of Allah's creation. These values become the foundation for students to work together and establish positive interactions. Collaborative skills are honed through group work activities, where students are directed to examine the content of the verse and relate it to the context of their social life. For example, they discuss the importance of tolerance, respect for each other, and appreciation of different ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and others in accordance with the values in the verse. In this group work, students together develop solution to various social problems related to differences and unity based on Islamic teachings.

Communication skills are trained through class discussions and the delivery of group Work. Students are given the Space to convey their thoughts orally in front of the class, Express their opinions clearly and politely, and respond to questions and feedback from Friends. This Was conveyed by the PAI teacher of SDN 015 Kota Garo ; "We ask the children to present the results of their discussion in front of the class, give comments to each other and answer questions".

With this approach, students not only understand the meaning of the verse intellectually, but also live and apply the values in real life through the practice of ethical communication and collaboration that respects differences. This is in line with the main purpose of Islamic education, which is not only to convey knowledge, but also to Shape The noble character of students in social Life. This show that PAI learning is integrated with Strengthening students's soft skills, especially in social Interaction and oral literacy. This is in line with previous research that emphasizes that the open discussion method and collaborative approach in PAI learning are methods that encourage students' active participation and allow them to learn through Interaction and Cooperation. This method not only helps students understand PAI materials, but also reinforces social values, empathy, and tolerance that are important in daily life. (Ballanie et al., 2024)

#### **d. Obstacles to the Integration of 21st Century Skills**

Some of the challenges faced by teachers include time constraints, lack of training related to innovative learning models, and student's low readiness to work independently.

"Sometimes it is difficult because PAI time is limited, while collaborative learning requires enough time." (Islamic Education Teacher at SDN 024 Kota Garo)

Education points to the need for more flexible curriculum policies and managerial support to enable optimal integration of active methods.

#### **e. School Support for the Implementation of 21st Century Skills-Based Learning**

The implementation of 21st Century skills-oriented learning in PAI learning especially on the material of Q.S. Al-Hujurat verse 13, requires optimal support from the

school. This support includes training for educators, provision of learning facilities, and the Creation of learning atmosphere that encourages the development of collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity skills of students. Some schools have introduce innovative learning approaches that are in line white the times.

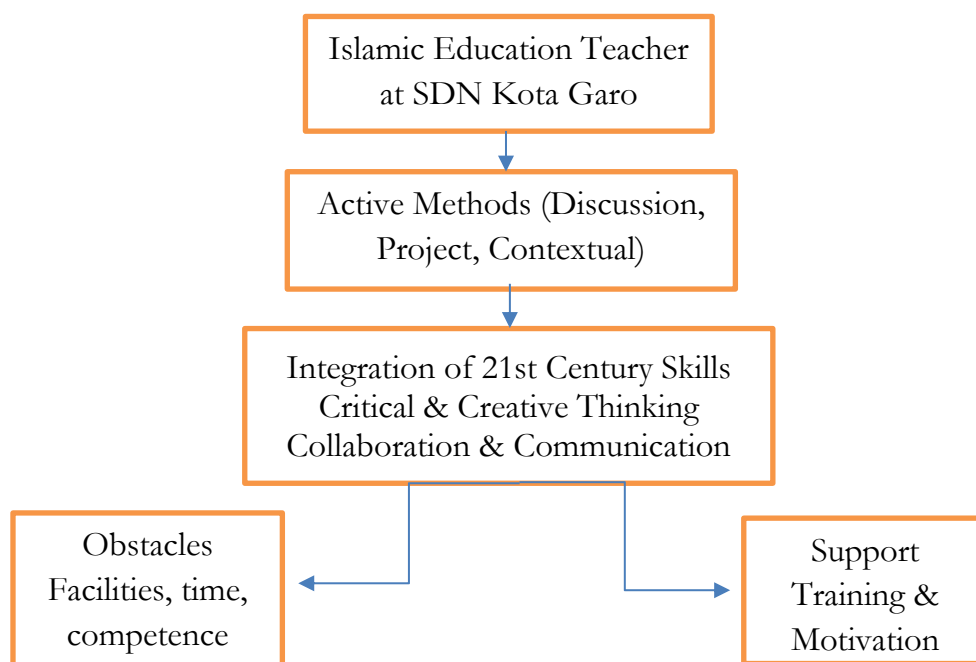
As expressed by the PAI teacher at SDN 003 Kota Garo ; "Alhamdulillah, Our school has often held workShops, so it help us to learn new methods" This program makes it easier for teachers to design PAI lessons that are more contextual, active, and full of Islamic values. in the discussion of Q.S. Al-Hujurat verse 13, which emphasizes the importance of knowing each other in diversity and upholding the value of brotherhood, students are encouraged to be active in group activities, asking questions, and presenting their thoughts in front of classmates. However, not all schools have sufficient resources to support the implementation. Constraints such as limited facilities and lack of training are still obstacles in equalizing the implementation of 21st Century skills-based learning. Therefore, the presence of schools is facilitators is very important in encouraging the transformation of PAI learning to be more contextual, in accordace with the times, and able to shape the character of students Who are spiritually and socially resilient.

#### **Data Verification and Conclusion Drawing**

After the above themes were formed, the results of the interviews were confirmed to the PAI teachers to ensure The accuracy and representation of the data. all informants agreed with the interpretation given.

This analysis confirms that PAI teachers at SDN kota garo have begun to integrate 21st Century skills in learning, albeit with various challenges. Learning activities Show a positive direction toward Strangthening critical, creative, collaborative and communicative Thinking, although they still need systemic support from schools and The education office.

**Figure Integration of 21st Century Skills into Islamic Religious Education Learning Methods**





The flowchart Shows The Stages of integrating 21st Century skills in learning Islamic religious education (PAI) at the elementary school level. This process Begins with the Central role of teachers Who implement various active learning Methods, such as discussions, Project -ased Learning, and contextual approaches. through the application of these strategies, students are encouraged to develop the ability to think critically, be creative, work together, and communicate effectively.

However, in practice, teachers still face various challenges, including limited facilities, narrow teaching time, and Lack of mastery of Technology. On the other hand, schools have provided certain forms of support, such as teacher training, provision of learning media, and moral encouragement, although not evenly or optimally. oberall, the sucess of integrating 21st century skills is highly dependent on the collabrati on between the learning approach used by by teachers, the readiness of students, and support from the school.

### Discussion

The results showed that PAI teachers have awareness of the importance of 21st Century skills, but still need assistance in implementing appropriate learning methodologies. these Results are in line with research by Huda. (Naili Nur Fitrotun, Moh. Miftakhul Huda, 2020) which found that the integration of 21st Century skills in PAI learning is highly dependent on teacher readiness and institutional support. this study explores How prospective PAI teachers perceive the merdeka curriculum which includes 21st Century skills and finds that the successful integration of 21st Century skills in PAI learning is highly dependent on teacher readiness and educational device support.

This Reseach also show the need for Continuous profesional development for PAI teachers, as well as the provission of learning resources that support collabrative and creative approaches. The implementation of Project-Based Learning, case studies, and value Reflection needs to be an integral part of the PAI curriculum in elementary schools.

### 4. Conclusion

The integration of PAI learning methodology based on 21st century skills at SDN Kota Garo Showed positive changes, especially in a more active, collaborative and reflective learning approach. However, the implementation still faces challenges in the form of limited teacher pedagogical competence and lack of supporting facilities. Continuous training strategies, strengthening academic supervision, and school policies that encourage learning innovation are mneeded. These findings contribute to the development of PAI learning practices that are more contextual and relevant to the needs of the times. Future research can focus on developing a 4C-based PAI learning model that is structured and easily adapted by elementary school teachers in various regions.

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