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Authentic Assessment Management in Islamic Religious Education Learning under the Merdeka Curriculum in Junior High Schools

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the concept of assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum and to describe its implementation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at formal educational institutions in Indonesia. The method employed is a literature review by critically examining relevant scientific sources published between 2022 and 2026. The findings reveal that the Merdeka Curriculum introduces a fundamental paradigm shift in educational assessment through three primary instruments namely diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, and summative assessment, which are holistic, continuous, and oriented toward comprehensive student competency development. In the context of PAI learning, this approach proves considerably more capable of capturing students' character development, spirituality, and internalization of Islamic values authentically compared to conventional systems that focused almost exclusively on the cognitive dimension. The study further reveals that implementation still faces real obstacles including limited teacher competence, high administrative burden, cultural resistance to change, and inadequate infrastructure in various regions. This study concludes that successful transformation of PAI assessment requires strong synergy among teachers, school management, and integrated educational policy at all levels in order to achieve meaningful and sustainable educational change.

Keywords: Chatbot, Social Interaction, Islamic Education Learning, Silent Classroom, Sociology of Islamic Education.

PRELIMINARY

In the Merdeka Curriculum, assessment is no longer positioned as a final activity that merely produces scores. It has become part of the teacher's effort to understand students' learning development. In Islamic Religious Education, assessment should not stop at mastery of subject matter; it should also address attitudes, worship skills, character formation, and the practice of Islamic values in daily life. This need is particularly important at the junior high school level, where students are in early adolescence, a stage in which identity, moral responsibility, and socio-religious awareness begin to develop.

Within this context, authentic assessment is highly relevant because it allows teachers to assess students through worship practice, attitude observation, portfolios, projects, reflection, and activities that are close to real-life experience. Ajjawi et al. (2024) argue that authenticity in assessment is not determined only by the similarity between tasks and real life, but also by the social and practical meaning of those tasks for students. This idea is consistent with PAI learning, which emphasizes the integration of knowledge, the strengthening of tawhid values, and character formation (Irawati et al., 2022). Therefore, authentic assessment in PAI needs to be managed from the planning stage to implementation, recording, feedback, and follow-up so that student development can be understood in a more complete and meaningful way.

Nevertheless, implementing authentic assessment in schools is not always easy. Some PAI teachers face difficulties in understanding the concept, designing instruments, managing limited time, and documenting students' development systematically. Assessment of attitudes, spirituality, and religious practice requires repeated observation and cannot rely solely on written tests. Setiawan (2024) notes that

PAI teachers encounter challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in understanding concepts, preparing learning tools, dealing with limited facilities, and conducting evaluation. Rahmawati et al. (2024) also emphasize that the quality of PAI learning evaluation is strongly influenced by teachers' ability to develop evaluation tools that suit learning needs. Similarly, Irawati et al. (2022) show that changes in students' attitudes in PAI learning require periodic observation rather than test-based assessment alone.

These conditions show that authentic assessment management in PAI requires greater attention. Assessment management is not limited to selecting assessment forms; it also includes planning, organizing instruments, implementation, documentation of results, feedback, and follow-up activities such as remedial and enrichment programs. In the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers need to integrate diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment into a connected learning flow. Hadziq (2023) explains that diagnostic assessment in PAI helps teachers identify students' initial abilities before determining appropriate learning strategies. At the same time, teacher competence is an important factor in successful curriculum implementation. Febriani et al. (2024) show that technical guidance on the Merdeka Curriculum can improve the theoretical and practical competence of religious studies teachers. Well-designed PAI lesson planning also contributes to improving educational quality and achieving learning objectives (Nurhusni et al., 2023).

Studies on authentic assessment, PAI evaluation, and the Merdeka Curriculum have developed in recent years. Achmad et al. (2022) describe authentic assessment as a way to identify cognitive, affective, and psychomotor achievement in Islamic Religious Education learning. Triono and Asmuki (2023) argue that authentic assessment remains relevant in the Merdeka Curriculum because it gives attention to both process and learning outcomes. From a management perspective, Jannah and Istikomah (2024) emphasize that PAI learning evaluation needs to be managed through planning, implementation, and supervision so that it can run effectively.

The role of teachers is central in the development of evaluation tools. Rahmawati et al. (2024) highlight the role of PAI teachers in developing evaluation instruments that support quality learning, while Hatta (2025) discusses the construction of authentic assessment in PAI learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum. In relation to personality formation, Nuryana et al. (2022) show that the internalization of prayer values contributes to students' personality development. These studies indicate that assessment in PAI cannot be separated from the broader goal of forming religious awareness, moral responsibility, and Islamic character.

International scholarship also supports the relevance of authentic assessment for contemporary learning. Vlachopoulos and Makri (2024) explain that authentic assessment is closely related to the development of twenty-first-century skills, while Nieminen et al. (2025) connect authentic assessment with students' epistemic agency. These perspectives show that authentic assessment does not merely measure learning outcomes; it also provides opportunities for students to become active participants who construct meaning and demonstrate their competence in contextual tasks.

Although previous studies provide an important foundation for developing PAI assessment, field studies that specifically connect authentic assessment, assessment management, PAI learning, and the junior high school context are still limited. This gap opens an opportunity to examine how authentic assessment in PAI is planned, implemented, documented, and followed up in school practice.

Based on this research gap, the present study examines the management of authentic assessment in Islamic Religious Education learning under the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 4 Kalijati. The focus is not only on the types of assessment used by the teacher, but also on how the teacher plans assessment, implements it in the classroom, documents the results, evaluates the process, and uses assessment data as the basis for follow-up learning. A qualitative field approach was selected so that the practice of authentic assessment management in PAI could be understood through teachers' experiences and the real conditions of the school.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a qualitative approach is used to understand a phenomenon in depth based on the experiences, meanings, and social contexts of research participants. In line with this view, Yin (2018)

explains that a case study is appropriate when the research focuses on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. On this basis, this study was directed at understanding the management of authentic assessment in Islamic Religious Education learning under the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 4 Kalijati.

The research site was SMPN 4 Kalijati. The research subjects consisted of the Islamic Religious Education teacher as the main informant, and the vice principal for curriculum affairs and students as supporting informants. The PAI teacher was selected because of direct involvement in designing and implementing authentic assessment. The vice principal for curriculum affairs provided information on school policy and supervision, while students were involved to obtain an overview of their experiences in taking part in authentic assessment in PAI learning. Informants were selected purposively. Sugiyono (2019) explains that purposive sampling is used when informants are chosen based on certain considerations, especially because they have knowledge, experience, or direct involvement with the research focus.

Data were collected through interviews, observation, and document analysis. Interviews were used to obtain information about the management of authentic assessment. Observation was conducted to examine the PAI learning process and the implementation of assessment in the classroom. Document analysis was carried out on teaching modules, assessment instruments, scoring rubrics, score lists, teacher notes, students' assignments, and other relevant supporting documents. In qualitative research, Sugiyono (2019) places interviews, observation, and documentation as complementary data collection techniques that can provide a more complete understanding of the research phenomenon.

Data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Miles et al. (2014) explain that qualitative data analysis involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction was conducted by selecting data that were relevant to the focus of the study. Data display was presented in narrative form based on the themes of planning, implementation, documentation, obstacles, strategies, and follow-up of authentic assessment. Conclusions were drawn by interpreting data from interviews, observations, and documentation comprehensively.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Planning Authentic Assessment in the Governance of PAI Learning

The shift in the assessment paradigm within the Merdeka Curriculum indicates a fundamental change in the function of assessment in learning. Assessment is no longer understood only as a tool for measuring learning outcomes at the end of instruction, but as part of a pedagogical process that supports students' learning development. Wiliam (2011) explains that assessment for learning places evidence of learning as the basis for adjusting instruction, so assessment becomes a means of improving the learning process. Hutchinson and Hayward (2011) similarly argue that learning-oriented assessment requires a more dialogical and reflective relationship between teachers and students.

In PAI learning, this paradigm shift encourages teachers to design assessment that reflects the integration of knowledge, attitude, and religious practice. Assessment planning begins with identifying learning objectives, mapping learning outcomes, selecting appropriate instruments, and preparing rubrics that can describe students' performance objectively. The teacher needs to ensure that the instruments used are aligned with the character of PAI, such as worship practice, Qur'anic reading, moral behavior, reflection, and project-based tasks that are relevant to students' daily lives.

At SMPN 4 Kalijati, authentic assessment planning is carried out through teaching modules and assessment instruments prepared before classroom instruction. The teacher integrates diagnostic assessment to identify students' initial understanding, formative assessment to monitor learning progress, and summative assessment to determine learning achievement. This planning process shows that authentic assessment management requires not only technical preparation, but also pedagogical awareness of how students develop religious understanding and Islamic character.

Implementation of PAI Assessment within the Merdeka Curriculum Framework

The implementation of assessment under the Merdeka Curriculum in formal PAI learning does not proceed without challenges. The studies reviewed in this research consistently show a significant gap between assessment concepts in policy documents and actual practice in schools. This gap is not caused

only by limited teacher understanding of new assessment concepts, but is also related to structural and cultural factors that shape educational practice in Indonesia.

One dominant factor is the long-standing tradition of score-based assessment in school culture. For decades, students, teachers, and parents have been accustomed to viewing assessment primarily through numerical grades. Consequently, the shift toward more holistic and authentic assessment requires time, adaptation, and institutional support. The transition from the previous curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum has also affected syllabi and learning materials, and its implementation still requires adjustment (Azmiyah, Amanah et al., 2024).

In the classroom, the PAI teacher applies authentic assessment through worship practice, attitude observation, individual assignments, group projects, portfolios, and reflection. These forms of assessment allow the teacher to observe students' religious competence more comprehensively. However, the implementation often faces practical limitations, especially limited time for observation, the large number of students, and the need to record assessment results accurately. Shafii and Berger (2025) explain that formative assessment is often constrained by teachers' assessment literacy, limited resources, class size, and a strong examination-oriented culture. Similar patterns can be seen in the implementation of PAI assessment in Indonesian schools.

Challenges in Implementing PAI Assessment under the Merdeka Curriculum

Although the assessment concept in the Merdeka Curriculum offers several advantages over previous systems, its implementation in schools faces multidimensional challenges. These challenges include teacher competence, availability of resources, school culture, administrative demands, and expectations from parents and the community. In PAI learning, the challenge becomes more complex because assessment does not only measure cognitive mastery, but also attitudes, worship habits, and the internalization of Islamic values.

The findings indicate that teachers need sufficient assessment literacy to design rubrics, conduct observation, interpret student performance, and provide meaningful feedback. Without adequate understanding, authentic assessment may become a mere administrative requirement rather than a genuine tool for improving learning. Another challenge is the high administrative burden. Teachers are required to prepare teaching modules, assessment instruments, scoring records, and documentation, while also managing classroom activities and providing feedback to students.

Infrastructure also affects the implementation of authentic assessment. Some learning activities require supporting facilities, such as worship spaces, learning media, digital documentation tools, and access to technology. When these facilities are limited, teachers need to adapt their assessment strategies so that authentic assessment can still be implemented realistically and fairly. Cultural resistance is another obstacle because some parents and students still regard written tests and numerical scores as the main indicators of success.

Relevant and Innovative Models of PAI Assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum

To respond to these challenges, teachers need systematic and creative efforts to design PAI assessment models that are consistent with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and realistic within diverse school contexts. An ideal PAI assessment model should integrate diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment synergistically. It should also accommodate differences in students' abilities and record their character and spiritual development authentically and meaningfully.

A relevant model begins with diagnostic assessment at the start of learning to map students' prior knowledge, religious habits, and learning needs. Formative assessment is then conducted throughout the learning process through observation, questioning, reflection journals, peer assessment, and performance tasks. Summative assessment is used at the end of a learning unit to evaluate achievement through projects, practice, written tests, or portfolios. This integrated model enables teachers to obtain a more balanced picture of students' development.

Innovation in PAI assessment can also be strengthened through contextual tasks. For example, students may be asked to demonstrate worship practice, create reflections on moral issues, develop projects on Islamic values in daily life, or compile portfolios of religious activities. These tasks are more

meaningful because they connect learning with students' real experiences. Digital tools may also support documentation and feedback, provided that teachers and schools have adequate access and competence.

The Relevance of Merdeka Curriculum Assessment to the Development of Students' Islamic Character

The most fundamental dimension that distinguishes assessment in PAI from other subjects is its close relationship with students' character and spirituality. Susilowati (2022) shows that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education is closely linked to character formation. Therefore, the logic of assessment in PAI cannot be equated entirely with subjects that are more oriented toward cognitive achievement.

Authentic and holistic PAI assessment does not only measure the extent to which students understand religious material cognitively. More importantly, it examines how far this material shapes students' personality, attitudes, and behavior in daily life. This dimension makes PAI assessment more complex, sensitive, and meaningful than assessment in many other subjects. Teachers need to observe students consistently, provide constructive feedback, and guide them toward improved religious practice and moral behavior.

Authentic assessment supports the development of Islamic character because it gives students opportunities to demonstrate values in practice. Through worship practice, attitude observation, reflection, and social projects, students are encouraged to connect religious knowledge with real action. In this way, assessment becomes part of character education, not merely a mechanism for assigning grades.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the research findings and supporting literature, it can be concluded that the Merdeka Curriculum brings a fundamental change to the assessment paradigm in Islamic Religious Education learning. Assessment is no longer positioned merely as a tool for measuring learning outcomes, but as an integral part of the learning process that supports students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. The concept of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment provides broader space for PAI teachers to identify students' initial abilities, monitor learning progress, and evaluate achievement in a more holistic and contextual manner.

The management of authentic assessment in PAI learning requires careful planning, consistent implementation, systematic documentation, evaluation, and meaningful follow-up. At the junior high school level, authentic assessment is particularly relevant because students are in a developmental phase where religious identity, moral responsibility, and social awareness begin to form. Through observation, worship practice, projects, portfolios, and reflection, teachers can assess students' character, spirituality, and internalization of Islamic values more authentically.

However, the implementation of authentic assessment still faces real challenges, including limited teacher competence, administrative workload, cultural resistance to change, time constraints, and inadequate supporting facilities. Therefore, the successful transformation of PAI assessment depends on strong synergy among teachers, school leaders, and educational policymakers. Authentic assessment will be more effective when it is supported by teacher training, practical instruments, manageable documentation systems, and school policies that encourage assessment as a tool for improving learning and shaping students' Islamic character.

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